LITERACY *and the* SCHOOLS

L'ALPHABÉTISATION *et les* ÉCOLES

A CONFERENCE REPORT
UN RAPPORT DE COLLOQUE

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Fédération canadienne des
enseignantes et des enseignants

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LITERACY AND THE SCHOOLS

L'alphabétisation et les écoles

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WELCOMING REMARKS

Allan McDonald
Canadian Teachers' Federation

Until recently, most Canadians, including teachers, believed that they lived in a society in which most people were literate, with the possible exception of a few unfortunates who had never attended school. The advent of International Literacy Year and the Southam study of literacy which preceded it have, however, brought to our attention a truer picture -- that there is a substantial proportion of the population, including many young adults, with very limited literacy skills. Most of these people have attended Canadian schools, including secondary school.

It would be easy to deny that any students leave Canadian schools with inadequate literacy skills, or to become defensive about the question of illiteracy. The Canadian Teachers' Federation has chosen, instead, to recognize that there is a problem. We know that some children, as a result of social, economic, cultural and medical circumstances, do not do well in school, develop histories of poor marks and failure, and often drop out of high school. They are very likely to become the young adults that someone will classify as functionally illiterate. They are also those who will likely live in poverty, and whose children will, again, have trouble with their school work.

To recognize the problem is not to solve it. Schools and teachers have tried, over the past decades, to provide programs and instruction which will help less advantaged students do better in school. Schools and teachers cannot, however, be expected to deal with this matter in isolation. If we truly want more students to reach higher levels of literacy, all interested agencies in Canadian society -- governments, social agencies, parents and, of course, teachers -- must form a partnership to achieve this goal.

As its contribution to International Literacy Year, CTF has undertaken the following activities:

1. Development and publication of a national policy on Functional Literacy

2. Sponsorship of a research study on teachers' views of literacy

3. Organization of a program of grants enabling classroom teachers to carry out literacy-related research

4. Sponsorship of a major national conference (May 14-16) to enable representatives of various sectors of society to discuss literacy problems and solutions under the general title Literacy and the Schools.

The Federation welcomes you to Ottawa and invites you to begin consideration of this very important topic.

THE NEW LITERACY

Thomas P. d'Aquino
President and Chief Executive Officer
Business Council on National Issues

Those of you who were around on October 4, 1957, can reminisce with me about coming home from school to hear a strange new beeping sound coming over the radio -- a bit like the CBC's noon time signal. It was Sputnik. The Russians had launched a space satellite, and with it a wave of self-doubt and re-examination that washed over North America and shook us out of our postwar complacency. Remember the articles about why Ivan can read and Johnny can't? Remember the startling revelations about the little Red schoolhouse? How the Russians were producing scientists and engineers faster than America turned out lawyers? Education was suddenly in, and especially scientific education.

Canadians at that time, as I recall, were a bit smug about our own education system. The Americans, we said to ourselves, had too many courses in basketweaving. In fact, Deweyism had already done its work on the U.S. education system -- whereas Hall and Dennis had not yet been unleashed on us. At any rate, we did catch some of that enthusiasm for excellence that Sputnik inspired. The smartest and most honoured kid in my high school graduating class was the one who got the General Motors Scholarship to major in mathematics.

Now if Rip Van Winkle had gone to sleep in 1957 and awakened recently, he might well have a sense of déjà vu as he surveyed the present state of concern over education. Indeed, that first post-Sputnik flurry of excitement was a flash in the pan. Whether through complacency or distraction by other social issues, we allowed our education system to deteriorate to the point where once again we are confronting a crisis of confidence. But this time the stakes are higher and the danger more real. Sputnik may have been a mere falling star and the Russian threat to "bury" us economically an empty bluff that collapsed in sullen stagnation. But who will venture to say the same about our competitors today -- the Japanese who go to school for 240 days a year compared to our 180, and of whom 95% go on to the equivalent of at least two years' college education; the Germans, the Koreans ...? We cannot now hide our competitive shortcomings in a continental cocoon and expect to prosper from a hold on proprietary technology or from our reserves of national resources.

We Canadians are now inescapably part of a global economy. Let no one suppose that the Free Trade Agreement with the United States has diminished that fact. The FTA may give us some breathing space to rationalize our economy, to build on our strengths within the relatively friendly, familiar context of the North

American market. But the Americans, as much as we, are now, for good or ill, part of something much bigger -- a worldwide system of production, services and markets, where the barriers to trade and capital flows are disappearing, where a car is made of components from a dozen lands and where the opinion of investors on the other side of the world can make or break us. Competitiveness is the watchword of the day.

And what is the key determinant of competitiveness? It is not endowment with natural resources, nor is it proximity to markets, nor is it the existence of a mass of unskilled cheap labour. You can all think of countries successful or otherwise that bear out these assertions. We live in what has been called the information age. The ability to receive, understand and apply information or knowledge is becoming the key to success in every field of economic endeavour. Robotics, automated warehousing, computer assisted design and manufacture, characterize the state-of-the-art factory, where one skilled technician can command the output that 50 workers used to produce -- and at a higher, more uniform quality. Instant and sophisticated communications have revolutionized large parts of the service industry, like banking and investing. Medicine and health care, engineering, even agriculture and food processing are increasingly "high tech". We may, in fact, posit that our very survival in the face of the threat of climate change is dependent on advances in knowledge -- for example, in finding new ways of producing energy without pollution or greenhouse gases.

A disturbing fact about the knowledge explosion from a North American viewpoint is that we are generating a decreasing share of it. More patents are now filed each year in Japan than in our continent. A second unsettling feature is the remarkable mobility of knowledge. It can take root and spring up in a startling competitive fashion anywhere in the world where conditions are right. This is now happening in places with people who not only have the needed skills but are willing to work harder for less immediate remuneration than Canadians care to do. And that means that if we are to maintain our standard of living, we must be that much more productive than they.

How well suited are we Canadians to sustain our relative productivity in the world of the 90's and beyond, faced with this kind of competition? Ask the factory manager who finds the high school graduate he just hired can't read an instruction manual. Ask the college administrator who has to put 40% of the freshman class through remedial math or reading. Ask the engineering firms who are constantly raiding each other because there is a shortage of engineers. More generally, consider these dismal statistics:

- *Between twenty and twenty-five percent of the adult Canadian population cannot read or write well enough to cope with the basic communications that modern life demands. They are functional illiterates.*

- *Over 30% of kids entering high school will not graduate. They are dropouts.*

Worse, I was shaken to learn from the Southam survey of 1987 that there are 2.4 million high school graduates who tested functionally illiterate, and 1.7 million of the dropouts who did not. That suggests a disturbingly low correlation between school and literacy.

All this tells me that the schools are failing Canada. They are failing to prepare our youth to cope in the world ahead of them and failing the country that depends on them for its future prosperity.

That much is clear to the economic managers of Canada. Less clear is what to do about it. One thing I know is not a solution. It is common in our country to think we can fix a problem by throwing more money at it, particularly government money. But that won't work this time. Public education in Canada already gets the second or third highest funding among industrialized countries, as a portion of national income. Seventy per cent of that funding is for primary and secondary schooling, and here our outlays per student have tripled in real terms, since 1960. I don't believe Canadian taxpayers -- whether at the local, the provincial or the federal level, they're all the same taxpayers -- can or should be expected to pay more. What we need is to spend it smarter.

That I know is easier said than done. I'm not in a good position to tell teachers anything new about the philosophical and practical strains that beset public education today, but I can offer a few observations on them.

First, there is the problem of expectation overload. Society has been demanding that the schools pick up an ever larger part of the burden of civilizing our youngsters. What used to be the accepted responsibility of the family, the church, and the Scouts is now dumped on the schools, which must serve as baby sitter, imparter of moral precepts, and safe-sex instructor. What wonder if there's no time in the day to teach the kids to read?

Then there is what is often called the process versus product debate. One does not have to agree, for example, with George Radwanski's recommendations to appreciate his analysis of where the so-called student-centred approach has got us. It is a laudable -- an essential -- goal to help each student realize his or her potential, with self esteem intact. But to process a child through twelve years of school and push him out the end without any meaningful measurement or comparison of what he has learned, is not. I'm not proposing that we set up cram-schools like Japan's "juka" centres, but in retrospect the old Ontario departmental exams did at least set some recognized standards. An activity that consumes over 5% of our GNP ought to have a measurable product. A high school diploma should signify more than a certain amount of time spent in school.

That bald statement, of course, begs a great question. What do we want the graduate to have to show for his schooling? Certainly he needs factual knowledge -- how can we expect people to cope with the complex duties of citizenship or employment if they have not mastered written language and the basics of mathematics, and have little idea of the history, geography and economy of the world they live in? How can we preserve our cultural foundations if Shakespeare and Molière are unknown or unintelligible to the next generation? I wonder indeed if the public policy debates now raging around us would be more productive if citizens were better informed about Canada's own economy and system of government?

But consider this. It is being predicted that the typical student now leaving high school will hold seven or eight jobs during his or her life and embark on as many as three separate careers. It is estimated that in technically oriented occupations, one half of the jobs will have changed their characteristics fundamentally in five years. The body of human knowledge, someone has been bold enough to assert, is doubling every half decade. So whatever a student may have managed to learn before he or she graduates, he or she is going to face a lifelong challenge of continuously learning more, adapting to changes in work and in every day life, upgrading and amending his or her coping skills. Adaptability, flexibility, capacity to absorb and master new knowledge -- these are the attributes that will determine his or her success in life and the contribution he or she can make to society. In short, these are what will keep future generations competitive.

Another source of tension in the system is the question of access versus quality. Canada's "baby bust" demographics mean that today's kids are going to have to carry a heavier societal load through their working lives. Today's unemployment figures mask the fact that we are going to face a labour shortage before the decade is out. As I mentioned, we already have too few qualified people in many fields. Nor is immigration likely to fill the gap as it did for previous generations. So while on the one hand the job prospects for unskilled, unadaptable youth will deteriorate, the demand for skilled, flexible people will increasingly go unfilled. You will appreciate the real national loss implicit in both these factors. We simply cannot afford to waste some significant portion of our human capital by leaving thousands of kids intellectually underdeveloped. This is an obvious argument for keeping access to schooling as wide open as possible -- for fighting "dropoutism", for ensuring that all students progress as far as their abilities will take them, including into post secondary school.

But if this is an argument for a citizens' army of the educated, we also have to worry about where the field commanders are going to come from. Who will provide the intellectual leadership and command the strategic heights in our battle for national competitiveness? We are graduating fewer engineers and scientists than we did 20 years ago, while the demand for them is growing at three times the overall job market rate. Our schools must inspire our brightest youngsters to enter the "tough"

disciplines, to exert their supreme competitive efforts, to strive for the top in their professions. We must forget the levellers' claptrap about elitism. We must develop centres of excellence throughout the educational system, where ability reinforces ability and commitment inspires commitment. In short, we have to have a system that produces quality to match the best our competitors have.

Let me mention briefly a further issue. Who can ignore, as we flounder on the shoals of Meech Lake, that all-pervasive fact of life in Canada -- the federal/provincial dimension? We sometimes have cause to bemoan the lack of a national focus for education -- Canada may be the only country in the world without a national Minister of Education. At a time when there are so many stresses on our national fabric, it is perhaps a disadvantage for Canada that education cannot be more of a force for cohesion, for understanding, for shared commitment to shared goals. But there is also the old saw about strength in diversity, and to the extent that ten heads are better than one there is the chance that one province or another will find the way and so set the path to better education. I myself have been impressed with the progress of my native British Columbia following the Sullivan Report's recommendations. Then too, there are the promising initiatives of the Council of Education Ministers of Canada to work towards some national standards of comparability among the systems. And here are you today, teachers from all over the country, focusing your efforts on what I believe is the number one national issue for Canada. I wish you well. In many respects, Canada's future prosperity depends more on you collectively than on anyone else. Each of you carries, in other words, an awesome responsibility. But in sharing the knowledge and aspirations of our own young people, it is not a heartless or greed driven prosperity that you should be preparing them for -- but a prosperity that is characterized most by the qualities of wisdom and humanity combined -- those qualities which, coupled with hard work, have given rise to truly great civilizations.

Aristotle summed up this sentiment over 2000 years ago when he wrote: All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth. In a more modern context, let me close with a word about business's interests and role.

My remarks are not gratuitous pontification from the glass-and-aluminium tower. Business is not just another interest group demanding to be placated. Business is the engine of economic life. It is the main employer in Canada. People who work for business produce most of the wealth and pay most of the taxes that support our public sector programs, including education. The future of business and therefore the Canadian way of life is in a very real sense dependent on how well our education system performs.

L'ALPHABÉTISATION ET L'ÉDUCATION DE BASE : UNE MISSION À ASSUMER SOLIDAIREMENT

Robert Bisaillon
Président du
Conseil supérieur de l'éducation

INTRODUCTION

On m'a demandé de traiter de l'alphabétisation dans une perspective éducative. Or, c'est bien de cela qu'il s'agit d'abord, l'alphabétisation étant une manifestation élémentaire du droit d'apprendre, tel que rappelé dans la Déclaration de la quatrième Conférence internationale de l'Unesco sur l'éducation des adultes.

Cette déclaration[1] parle de la reconnaissance du droit d'apprendre comme d'un enjeu majeur pour l'humanité et précise que ce droit n'est pas un luxe culturel à retenir seulement pour l'avenir, à exercer une fois notre survie assumée, à advenir après qu'auront été satisfaits les besoins primaires. C'est un outil indispensable dès maintenant à la survie de l'humanité. Sans le droit d'apprendre, il ne peut y avoir de développement humain. Apprendre est le mot clé. Mais ce droit d'apprendre n'est pas seulement un instrument de développement économique : il doit être reconnu comme un des droits fondamentaux. L'acte d'apprendre, en effet, qui est au coeur de l'activité éducative, fait passer l'être humain d'état d'objet à la merci de l'événement au statut de sujet créateur de son histoire.

La conférence qui débute aujourd'hui s'adresse à des éducateurs qui jouent un rôle majeur dans le processus d'alphabétisation des jeunes mais qui, aujourd'hui, réalisent que le phénomène de l'analphabétisme, tout en interpellant l'école, a une dimension sociale dont la prise de conscience doit être de même nature pour que la mission de l'école porte ses fruits.

Ici comme ailleurs, l'éducation est un outil essentiel au plein épanouissement des personnes, à leur autonomie et à leur dignité. Dans une société en pleine mutation - on parle de notre entrée dans une société postindustrielle ou encore dans une société de l'information et de la communication - une personne qui ne possède pas les capacités de base en lecture, en écriture et en calcul voit immanquablement son autonomie réduite. Elle éprouve aussi quelque difficulté à comprendre l'évolution de la société et à la critiquer, d'une part, à exercer de façon éclairée, responsable et efficace ses rôles sociaux de citoyen, parent, travailleur ou consommateur, d'autre part.

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1 Déclaration de la quatrième Conférence internationale de l'Unesco sur l'éducation des adultes, Paris, 19-28 mars 1985.

Le fait qu'une personne adulte n'ait pas l'éducation de base jugée suffisante pour se tirer d'affaire dans la vie quotidienne n'est pas non plus sans conséquence sur le développement culturel, social et économique, voire politique, de sa société d'appartenance. Le progrès de la culture, la maîtrise de l'activité productive, la capacité concurrentielle des entreprises, la participation à la chose publique sont directement touchés par le fait que des personnes ne possèdent pas les capacités primordiales et essentielles à l'exercice de leur autonomie personnelle et à leur participation sociale. Or, c'est cela précisément que recouvre le phénomène de ce qu'on appellera ici une éducation de base insuffisante, incluant l'analphabétisme.

Dans un avis récent[2] au ministre de l'Éducation et ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Science, à qui il fait rapport, le Conseil supérieur de l'éducation a souligné, comme à plusieurs occasions auparavant, l'importance d'une solide éducation de base pour tous, au regard du progrès des personnes et du développement de la société. Chaque personne a droit à cette éducation de base, pour son propre épanouissement. En contrepartie, une société profondément transformée par les nouvelles technologies, la concurrence internationale, la mondialisation des rapports sociaux et l'avènement d'une culture de l'information et de l'informatisation, doit aussi pouvoir compter, pour son propre avenir, sur des personnes qui possèdent au moins les capacités essentielles à leur fonctionnement autonome en société.

En cette Année internationale de l'alphabétisation, il paraît plus propice que jamais de s'interroger sur la vie et les besoins de ces centaines de milliers de citoyens qui ne semblent pas posséder les capacités de base qui les rendraient efficaces dans notre société et qui, pour cette raison, ne peuvent pas participer pleinement à son développement et qui sont aussi souvent relégués dans des emplois précaires et peu rémunérés ou encore confinés au chômage ou à l'aide sociale. C'est surtout une occasion renouvelée de nous interroger sur le rôle de l'école dans cette mission d'éducation de base pour tous.

Nous le ferons en identifiant d'abord en quoi consiste cette mission d'éducation de base pour tous, enjeu majeur à relever; en second lieu, nous verrons qu'elle requiert l'engagement de tous les agents dynamiques de la société; enfin nous examinerons comment l'élimination du problème à sa source concerne particulièrement les établissements d'éducation.

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2 CSE, L'Alphabétisation et l'éducation de base au Québec : une mission à assumer solidairement, Québec 1990.

I - Un défi majeur : l'éducation de base pour tous

Il s'agit d'un besoin et d'un droit de la personne qui participe à la vie d'une communauté, d'abord. L'alphabétisation fonctionnelle consiste en ces habiletés qui permettent à chaque personne de continuer à lire, à écrire et à calculer en vue de son propre développement et de celui de la communauté. Moyen indispensable à l'actualisation du potentiel humain de chaque personne, elle est en quelque sorte une capacité d'autoformation et réside essentiellement dans l'acquisition des outils fondamentaux nécessaires aux personnes pour l'exercice de leurs divers rôles sociaux et pour la poursuite d'études ultérieures. Cette éducation de base, faite d'apprentissages fondamentaux et transférables qui permettent à chaque personne de développer son potentiel et de s'approprier les changements sociaux, économiques et culturels, est un droit et, en définitive, une clé qui ouvre plusieurs portes. Il est donc important d'articuler l'alphabétisation autour de la formation de base. Cette formation de base est conçue comme un ensemble de connaissances, d'habiletés et d'attitudes fondamentales, applicables à des situations changeantes et multiples et qui demeurent les instruments indispensables de l'affirmation et du développement des personnes. Et l'alphabétisation constitue le noyau irréductible de cette formation de base.

Il s'agit également d'un besoin de la personne confrontée aux exigences du marché du travail. Parmi les compétences requises à cet égard, ainsi que le reconnaît l'Organisation de coopération et de développement économiques (OCDÉ), signalons la propension à l'acquisition continue de connaissances, les habiletés de base en écriture et calcul, les aptitudes à établir des relations sociales, à s'exprimer, à communiquer, à comprendre et à utiliser les symboles. Ces compétences minimales aux dires de l'OCDÉ, constituent l'assise d'autres connaissances et habiletés.

L'ensemble de ces considérations confirme le Conseil dans sa conviction qu'une éducation de base, permettant à toutes les personnes de posséder les capacités qui les rendent fonctionnelles et autonomes dans leur milieu de travail et dans l'ensemble de leur vie quotidienne, constitue un défi majeur pour la société. Une telle éducation de base ne se résume pas à la scolarisation, bien que celle-ci doive normalement y apporter une importante contribution. On peut penser que c'est le besoin ressenti d'une telle éducation de base qui peut finalement motiver des personnes qui ont aussi besoin d'apprendre à lire, à écrire et à compter. Ici comme ailleurs, l'apprentissage d'un code n'a de sens qu'en lien avec son utilisation fonctionnelle.

Cette éducation de base, est-il besoin de le rappeler, évolue dans l'espace et dans le temps. L'étendue et le niveau des habiletés fondamentales qu'elle recouvre sont nécessairement en rapport avec l'évolution sociale, économique, culturelle et politique d'une société. Or l'évolution actuelle de la société entraîne l'évolution du seuil même des compétences jugées minimales à la fin de la scolarité obligatoire. La mission d'éducation de base ne sera donc pas aujourd'hui ce qu'elle aurait pu être

hier, bien que le noyau irréductible des apprentissages fondamentaux - lire, écrire, compter - soit toujours d'une certaine manière identique.

II - L'engagement de tous les agents dynamiques

Un choix de société a été fait, ici; reconnue comme un service public, l'éducation constitue l'une des missions essentielles de l'État. Mais cette responsabilité primordiale de l'État, tant en ce qui concerne l'enseignement aux jeunes qu'en matière d'éducation des adultes, ne devrait en aucune façon entraîner le désengagement des corps intermédiaires et des associations, des entreprises et des syndicats, des organismes et des groupes communautaires. Au contraire, la population dans son ensemble doit se sentir interpellée, et tout particulièrement par l'action à mener dans le domaine de l'alphabétisation et de l'éducation de base.

Ce qui importe d'abord, c'est une véritable prise de conscience sociale. Le phénomène de l'analphabétisme complet et de l'éducation de base insuffisante provient d'un large éventail de facteurs qui se renforcent souvent les uns les autres. De même, son ampleur est suffisamment significative - probablement une personne sur quinze reconnue comme analphabète complet et une personne sur quatre identifiée comme ayant une carence d'éducation de base - pour qu'on en arrive à percevoir qu'il y a là des conséquences importantes pour les personnes et pour toute la société.

Les personnes manquant ainsi d'habiletés fondamentales se retrouvent limitées dans leur propre développement et ne peuvent réaliser leur plein potentiel humain. Mais il y a là aussi des conséquences sociales, la société s'enfonçant elle même de la sorte dans une logique d'inégalités qui peut conduire à de graves crises sociales. Le phénomène porte aussi des conséquences économiques : par exemple, productivité diminuée et charges sociales de toutes sortes. Et le poids démographique des jeunes de 15 à 34 ans étant faible, les carences de ce groupe d'âge en éducation de base constitueront un handicap d'autant plus important pour sa contribution active au développement de la société. Il y a là, de toute évidence, des enjeux majeurs pour les personnes et pour la société, des questions de démocratisation culturelle, de justice sociale et de développement économique, qui concernent tous les agents économiques de la société.

L'engagement du plus grand nombre possible d'acteurs est donc requis. Chacun et chacune peut contribuer, selon ses compétences, à la solution de ce problème de société. L'ampleur de la tâche et l'urgence d'agir devraient convaincre quiconque qu'il y a, dans cette action forcément collective, de la place et du travail pour tous, chacun selon son champ d'activités, ses compétences et ses ressources.

Aucun organisme, fut-il un ministère de l'Éducation, ne peut à lui seul contrer ce phénomène. L'action d'une multitude d'agents est nécessaire pour cette tâche qui requiert, plutôt qu'une responsabilité exclusive, un engagement collectif. En prenant soin d'éviter la duplication des efforts et le gaspillage des ressources, c'est donc l'engagement de plusieurs acteurs qu'il importe de promouvoir.

Il n'existe pas de formule d'association unique entre partenaires. Mais toute association suppose des attitudes d'ouverture et de souplesse, de tolérance et de respect de l'autre. Toute association suppose également une volonté de mener à terme collectivement, une action qui dépasse les intérêts particuliers de chacun. Les rivalités et les chasses gardées, conduisant à la duplication des efforts et à la dissipation des énergies, ne peuvent que retarder la solution du problème. Et comme les manifestations diversifiées de ce problème de même que la multiplicité des causes s'opposent à un type uniforme d'intervention, on comprendra qu'elles exigent plutôt l'action différenciée, mais concertée, des partenaires.

III - L'élimination du problème à sa source

Jusqu'à maintenant, la lutte menée pour éliminer l'analphabétisme et les carences en éducation de base s'est principalement déroulée auprès des populations adultes concernées. C'est là qu'on a investi ressources et énergies. Et pourtant, au moment même où l'on offre aux adultes des services d'alphabétisation et d'éducation de base, on constate qu'un nombre significatif de jeunes quittent, chaque année, le système d'éducation sans posséder une telle éducation de base. Cela, malgré les efforts consentis pour rendre l'éducation plus accessible aux jeunes, efforts qui ont permis de réduire sensiblement les taux d'analphabétisme et d'éducation de base déficiente : on serait autour de 16 % chez les moins de 35 ans comparativement à 27 %, par exemple, chez les personnes ayant entre 35 et 54 ans, au Québec. C'est là une indication qu'une perspective de prévention peut constituer une clé importante dans l'entreprise de réduction du phénomène. Nous touchons la mission même des établissements d'éducation, ce faisant.

Entendons-nous bien, cependant, sur la prévention dont on parle ici. Il s'agit, d'abord et avant tout, que les organismes responsables de la petite enfance et que les intervenants scolaires aux paliers du préscolaire, du primaire et du secondaire jouent pleinement leur rôle éducatif et accomplissent adéquatement leur mission respective. C'est là la façon primordiale de prévenir l'analphabétisme et les carences en éducation de base; c'est la manière essentielle d'aller au-devant du phénomène et de lui faire obstacle. Mais la prévention consiste aussi dans les précautions que prennent les responsables, dans leur attention privilégiée et les services appropriés qu'ils mettent sur pied à l'égard de ceux et celles qui éprouvent davantage de difficultés dans leur cheminement éducatif. Éliminer le problème à la source, c'est donc faire tout ce qu'on peut, au bon moment, pour les petits enfants et les enfants.

Mais c'est aussi permettre à tous ceux qui quittent l'école secondaire de posséder une éducation de base suffisante qui leur permette de fonctionner en société de façon autonome.

3.1 - Prévention, d'abord, auprès de la petite enfance

L'influence déterminante de la période de zéro à cinq ans est maintenant un fait reconnu. Le Conseil a longuement étudié la situation des jeunes enfants et souligné l'importance d'un milieu familial stimulant et d'un environnement socio-éducatif de qualité. La société demande beaucoup aux parents des jeunes enfants, en tenant pour acquis que tous ont la compétence requise pour répondre adéquatement aux attentes et aux besoins éducatifs des enfants. Les transformations qu'a connues la famille rendent souvent difficile, pour certains parents, la tâche d'assurer cet environnement socio-éducatif de qualité. Ainsi les parents ont besoin d'être soutenus dans leur action éducative. On doit les aider à devenir attentifs aux difficultés d'apprentissage et de développement de leurs enfants et leur fournir des moyens à cet effet. Plus tôt et mieux l'enfant aura développé son langage, son sens de l'observation et ses capacités d'attention, moins il risquera de connaître des blocages paralysants dans son apprentissage de la lecture, de l'écriture et du calcul. Les parents ont donc besoin de services, non seulement pour assurer le bien-être et le développement physique de leur enfant, mais aussi pour le stimuler sur les plans intellectuel et culturel. Une telle approche éducative des besoins des jeunes enfants peut être promue et accentuée au sein de plusieurs réseaux : garderies, centres locaux de services communautaires, loisirs municipaux, centres culturels, organismes familiaux et socio-communautaires, établissements publics d'éducation et même médias. Chacun de ces réseaux d'organismes, sensibilisé à l'approche éducative et faisant preuve de créativité dans la recherche de moyens d'intervention, pourrait offrir aux parents un soutien professionnel approprié. Il va sans dire qu'une politique familiale gouvernementale, le cas échéant, représente un ciment appréciable des orientations, des initiatives, des services et des collaborations, en faveur des enfants.

3.2 - Cette présentation doit se poursuivre au préscolaire

L'investissement, à ce niveau, peut être associé à des bénéfices significatifs à moyen et long terme. Les maternelles sont particulièrement importantes en ce qui a trait à la prévention des difficultés dans l'apprentissage et le développement, notamment dans l'apprentissage du langage. Les maternelles cinq ans sont, pour beaucoup d'enfants, le premier lieu organisé d'activités proprement éducatives. Il

faut donc que l'éducation préscolaire qu'on y dispense soit réellement «un temps pour apprendre[3]». D'ailleurs, on a pu noter que des enfants de milieux socio-économiquement faibles ayant bénéficié d'une éducation scolaire précoce ont un taux d'absentéisme et d'échec plus faible que d'autres au primaire; qu'ils ont des notes plus élevées et une probabilité de persévérance aux études plus forte au secondaire; et qu'ils ont aussi plus de chances de poursuivre des études postsecondaires[4].

Il va sans dire que l'éducation préscolaire devrait accorder une attention au développement du vocabulaire, à la capacité de communiquer et aux habiletés facilitant l'apprentissage de la lecture et de l'écriture. Mais une collaboration étroite entre les parents, le personnel enseignant et le personnel professionnel s'avère primordiale, dès ce stade, à partir du moment où sont décelées des difficultés d'apprentissage.

Dans une perspective de prévention de l'analphabétisme et de l'insuffisance de l'éducation de base - plus positivement, aussi, dans l'optique du développement optimal de chaque enfant - il s'avérerait souhaitable de songer à étendre graduellement au cours de la présente décennie, la mise en place de maternelles quatre ans, et peut-être selon la formule une demi-maternelle et une demi-journée de garderie éducative, dans tous les milieux, à commencer évidemment par les milieux moins bien nantis sur le plan économique.

À chaque fois que la chose serait possible, il faudrait aussi trouver une garderie éducative jumelée à une maternelle cinq ans.

3.3 - L'école primaire est profondément concernée

En effet, les enfants y amorcent l'apprentissage formel de la lecture, de l'écriture et du calcul. Et chacun connaît l'importance d'un bon départ tout autant que les conséquences d'un début difficile. L'école primaire se présente donc comme un moment capital dans l'entreprise de prévention de l'analphabétisme, d'abord et avant tout parce que son rôle consiste précisément à alphabétiser les enfants et à leur faire acquérir les apprentissages fondamentaux de leur éducation de base. C'est au moment de ces premiers apprentissages formels en lecture, en écriture et en calcul qu'apparaissent les premiers blocages importants et que peut prendre naissance la démotivation à l'égard de l'étude. Les premiers apprentissages sont tout à fait déterminants, sans qu'on aille jusqu'à parler de déterminisme, pour la suite des apprentissages scolaires[5]. Aussi, on ne saurait trop insister sur la compétence des

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3 CSE, L'Éducation préscolaire : un temps pour apprendre, Québec, 1987.

4 Claude Montmarquette, Les Interventions scolaires en milieu défavorisé, Montréal, PUM, 1989, p. 88.

5 CSE, L'Orientation scolaire et professionnelle : par-delà les influences, un cheminement personnel, Rapport annuel 1988-1989.

maîtres à reconnaître les habiletés, à dépister les blocages et à prendre les mesures appropriées et sur le rôle fondamental de l'institution à cet égard, de même que sur l'importance, pour le personnel scolaire, de rechercher les causes de difficultés.

C'est en se recentrant sur le cheminement de l'enfant et en pratiquant, dans toute la mesure du possible, l'individualisation de l'action éducative, que l'école primaire peut contribuer à cette prévention. Il lui faut, à tout prix, permettre à chaque enfant d'acquérir les outils fondamentaux - dont font partie, au premier chef, la lecture, l'écriture et le calcul - qui le fassent cheminer vers l'autonomie, l'aident à gérer ses apprentissages, lui donnent la capacité d'apprendre à apprendre et lui procurent l'aptitude à prendre en charge ses apprentissages et son développement.

Si des outils d'évaluation et de dépistage existent, ils ne semblent pas toujours à la disposition des enseignants qui, par ailleurs, manquent parfois du perfectionnement nécessaire à leur utilisation ou, tout simplement, du temps requis pour leur usage efficace.

L'école primaire a donc un rôle clé dans l'acquisition de ces instruments fondamentaux qui sont au coeur même de l'éducation de base. Elle possède de ce fait, un rôle évident de prévention de l'analphabétisme[6]. Elle doit donc avoir les moyens de s'assurer que les services dispensés permettent à l'ensemble des enfants d'acquérir ces outils. Il lui faut aussi offrir aux enfants en difficulté d'adaptation et d'apprentissage les services professionnels dont ils ont besoin, en évitant de constituer d'indésirables ghettos ou d'étiqueter quelqu'un pour la vie. Il lui faut aussi offrir aux immigrants qu'elle accueille des services adéquats qui les empêchent eux-mêmes de se retrouver en difficulté d'adaptation et d'apprentissage.

Enfin peut-être y aurait-il lieu aussi de regarder du côté de l'utilisation du temps postscolaire et de voir dans quelle mesure l'école primaire pourrait poursuive son accompagnement éducatif de l'enfant, par l'entremise des activités parascolaires, de la garderie éducative ou des périodes d'études, par exemple. On peut penser ici, tout particulièrement, aux enfants de milieux socio-économiquement faibles et aux immigrants.

Parce que c'est à l'école secondaire que se joue, pour plusieurs, la dernière chance de se doter d'une éducation de base. Pour près de 40 % des jeunes, c'est d'ailleurs la dernière étape de leur formation initiale. On sait également qu'environ un élève sur trois quitte l'école secondaire sans avoir obtenu de diplôme. Plusieurs vont même quitter dès la fin de la fréquentation obligatoire.

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6 Rolf. R. Pritchard et Helen Yee, Johnny Came Back to School but Still can't Read, Toronto, Education Canada, 1989, p. 47.

L'élimination du problème à la source et la prévention dont on parle ici consistent essentiellement à empêcher qu'un jeune atterrisse en quelque sorte dans la société, sans cette éducation de base qui lui permette de fonctionner de façon autonome. Or, l'école secondaire est comme un passage obligé vers l'avant et vers l'arrière à la fois, ce qui représente une situation inconfortable pour remplir sa mission. En effet, orientée vers la poursuite d'études supérieures ou la qualification professionnelle des jeunes qu'elle accueille, l'école secondaire doit d'abord restaurer des apprentissages de base auprès de ceux et celles qui lui arrivent avec des retards significatifs et qui éprouvent des difficultés d'adaptation et d'apprentissage, renforcés du sentiment répété d'échecs.

À l'endroit de ces élèves, l'école secondaire devra explorer davantage des dimensions organisationnelles et pédagogiques assimilables à des cheminements particuliers de formation où on se préoccupera de connaître l'histoire du jeune et les causes de ses difficultés et surtout où on prendra le temps de réorganiser le processus d'apprentissage là où il s'est engourdi, paralysé ou brisé. D'autres élèves auront besoin de classes spéciales, mais tous requièrent finalement des services personnalisés et le soutien pédagogique et professionnel qui leur permettra de se doter des capacités minimales de l'éducation de base nécessaire au fonctionnement en société.

L'école secondaire a aussi à exercer sa fonction de prévention auprès de l'ensemble des effectifs qui lui sont confiés. Et c'est dans la classe que chaque enseignant peut apprécier les habiletés des élèves et dépister leurs blocages et c'est là aussi qu'il peut réaliser, au besoin, avec l'aide appropriée de professionnels, les gestes pédagogiques qui les aideront à surmonter leurs difficultés d'apprentissage. Les établissements scolaires doivent donc être attentifs aux besoins de perfectionnement des enseignants en matière de relation d'aide, de meilleure connaissance des processus d'apprentissage ou de compréhension de la pédagogie différenciée.

L'organisation scolaire ne favorise pas tellement la nécessaire attention personnalisée qu'exige la prévention. Le fonctionnement par période, le grand nombre d'élèves par groupe et l'intégration des élèves en difficulté, par exemple, ne suscitent guère l'intervention personnalisée. En ce domaine, le seul dévouement des enseignants et professionnels ne suffit pas; il faut l'appui des orientations et des ressources de l'établissement.

Il faut s'interroger sur les programmes d'études, les services d'aide, la pédagogie, l'organisation elle-même de l'école secondaire : tout cela est-il nettement axé sur l'acquisition par chacun et chacune des habiletés fondamentales qui les rendent fonctionnels et autonomes dans la vie quotidienne? Il faudrait aussi explorer des mesures mises en place en certains milieux ou pays, telles que la fréquentation scolaire obligatoire à temps partiel pour les 16 à 18 ans, les formules d'alternance

école-entreprise, des mesures d'insertion sociale et professionnelle où l'école demeure une ressource importante même pour des jeunes qui ne la fréquentent pas. De telles mesures indiquent que l'école doit se sentir concernée par ceux et celles qui songent à la quitter ou qui même l'on déjà quittée.

Le système d'éducation a donc un rôle clé à jouer dans la prévention de l'analphabétisme et des carences d'éducation de base, et ce, dès la formation initiale et même, pour une part, auprès des jeunes enfants. D'autres organismes, on l'a vu, ont aussi une fonction importante à remplir à cet égard. Ce que tous doivent finalement comprendre, c'est que la prévention est non seulement un service éducatif, mais aussi un bénéfice social et un investissement rentable.

Conclusion

J'ai volontairement omis de parler des services d'alphabétisation et d'éducation de base pour la population adulte. J'ai plutôt découpé un propos plus directement centré sur l'école, et sur les jeunes d'âge primaire et secondaire, même si l'avis du Conseil porte sur des interventions appropriées auprès des adultes analphabètes.

Notre société doit rehausser le degré d'alphabétisation de sa population au-delà des seuls apprentissages formels de la lecture, de l'écriture et du calcul, parce que l'analphabétisme, même fonctionnel, est incompatible avec les nécessités du développement rapide de la révolution scientifique et technique, dont l'humanité contemporaine est témoin, et parce qu'un niveau élevé d'éducation est la condition fondamentale pour que chaque personne puisse participer pleinement à la vie du monde contemporain.

Tous les enfants naissent analphabètes. La première tranche de leur initiation scolaire et culturelle consiste précisément à s'alphabétiser et à apprendre le fonctionnement autonome. L'école est le chemin obligé de cette initiation. Or, sur ce chemin, certains enfants sont particulièrement à risques, qui proviennent de milieux où les conditions de vie tournent le plus souvent autour de la pauvreté, du chômage, de l'assistance sociale, où l'instruction est peu valorisée, et à plus forte raison l'écrit, qui connaissent des échecs scolaires à répétition, qui viennent la ressentir, au moment même où se forme leur personnalité, leurs difficultés d'apprendre comme une déficience, un handicap et même, plus tard, comme une atteinte à leur intégrité personnelle; qui se destinent inévitablement à la dépendance et à la marginalisation, même au sein d'un groupe restreint.

Au moment même où la connaissance et les ressources humaines sont de plus en plus reconnues comme les principaux moteurs du développement des sociétés, et justifient une hausse des exigences scolaires, il faut aménager des cheminements pour les enfants les plus mal pris du point de vue de l'apprentissage : pour éviter que les difficultés ne se transforment en retards, que les retards scolaires n'engendrent

des échecs, que ces échecs répétés ne conduisent aux abandons scolaires et, finalement, que ces abandons ne réintroduisent des jeunes dans le circuit du manque d'éducation de base avec, cette fois, la conscience vive de leur situation.

J'ai insisté délibérément, ai-je dit, sur le rôle spécifique de l'école. Mais je voudrais souligner également en terminant, que l'analphabétisme est un problème aussi à dimension sociale et culturelle et qu'en ce sens, la mission d'alphabétisation et d'éducation de base doit être assumée solidairement par l'ensemble des acteurs sociaux et qu'une action planifiée, systémique, organique, à partir d'orientations et de plans d'action gouvernementaux indiquerait la reconnaissance sociale du problème, stimulerait les acteurs à agir, chacun selon ses compétences, et aurait pour effet de rassembler ces derniers, y compris l'école, autour des mêmes objectifs.

Peut-on souhaiter une telle perspective à l'horizon de l'an 2000?

Bonnes délibérations

READING, WRITING, TALKING AND THINKING: LITERACY IN THE SCHOOLS

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Writing must rank, along with the wheel, as one of man's greatest inventions and, like the wheel in all its various forms and uses, it has radically changed the nature of human existence. But, whereas the impact of the wheel has been largely to facilitate action in the material world, it is in the world of mental activity that the impact of writing has been most strongly felt. For what is made possible by writing -- that was not possible before -- is the representation of thoughts in a permanent and conventional form so that they can be recaptured at a later time or different place by anyone, including the original writer, who has a copy of the text and the knowledge and abilities necessary to interpret it. Writing, in other words, together with the means for reproducing texts, makes possible the systematic assembling of information so that it is publicly accessible whenever it is needed. And, at the same time, it provides a means whereby the individual, through reading, reflecting on, and revising the written text, can go beyond the original thoughts to achieve a depth and breadth of understanding that is inconceivable with the support of speech alone. Literacy, understood as the cultural practices that exploit the potential of writing, is therefore justly described as "a technology for the empowerment of mind".[1]

What is apparent, as soon as one stops to think about literacy in this way, as a set of cultural practices, is just how numerous and varied they are. Almost every aspect of contemporary life involves some use of print -- from paying in money at the bank, through renting a car, looking up what's on at the cinemas, taking minutes or notes at meetings, reading a novel at bedtime, to writing personal letters or keeping a journal. In fact, if one were to write down every event in which one was involved with a text of some kind during the course of a single day, the list would probably fill many pages. Rather than attempt to catalogue them, therefore, I want to suggest that it is more helpful to think in terms of a small number of rather general ways in which we engage with texts, whether as readers or as writers, according to the type of text involved and our purpose for engaging with it on the occasion. I have suggested five, as shown in the accompanying diagram (see Figure 1).[2]

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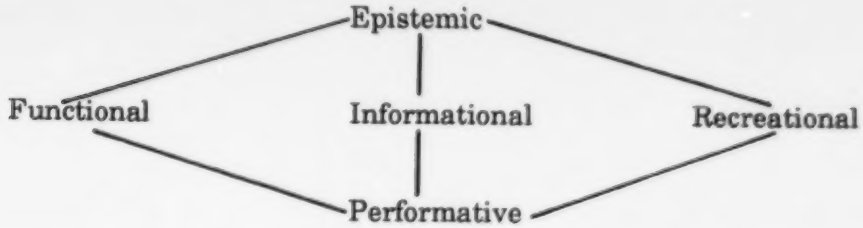
1 Bruner, J.S. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.

2 Wells, G. "Talk about text: Where literacy is learned and taught". *Curriculum Inquiry*, forthcoming.

Figure 1. Ways of Engaging with Texts
Literacy: A Repertoire of Ways of Engaging With Texts



At the middle level of the diagram are the three main ways in which we approach a text, either as reader or writer, when our purposes involve the use of the text for some end outside itself. These I have called:

- *functional*, when the purpose is to facilitate action;
- *informational*, when it is to obtain or convey information; and
- *re-creational*, when it is to explore and enjoy the possible worlds that can be created through words.

Supporting and presupposed by all three of these approaches is the

- *performative* way of engaging with the text -- managing the written code and the conventions for its use. This normally goes on at a level below conscious awareness, but it can become the focus of attention when necessary.

The fifth approach to a text, which I have shown as overarching the others, is the

- *epistemic*. This is the approach we adopt when, instead of simply accepting the text and using it for our current purpose, we critically examine it in order to consider alternative interpretations, to evaluate it, or to rethink and revise its content and its form and organization. And because it is in engaging with the text in this way that we most fully exploit its potential for enhancing our understanding, I have called this approach the epistemic, from the Greek word for knowledge.

Different though these five approaches are in the strategies they call upon when one is engaging with a particular text, they should not be thought of as incompatible alternatives. Nor should they be thought of as each applying only to a limited range of types of text. Rather, the different approaches should be seen as complementary,

to be selected according to the immediate purpose. Thus the same text may call forth different approaches at different points in one's engagement with it. For example, one might first read Dickens's "A Tale of Two Cities" for enjoyment and then, on another occasion, reread it to obtain detailed information about the plight of French aristocrats under the revolution. On yet another occasion, one might reread certain sections in order to see whether a friend's alternative interpretation could really be justified. Or all these approaches might co-occur during the course of a single reading.

In writing, too, one will almost certainly need to adopt several approaches. In planning the text as a whole, one will probably have a particular audience in mind and a purpose in addressing them, whether that of informing, directing or entertaining them. In the light of this purpose, therefore, one will select the appropriate genre and the mode of engagement that is typically associated with it. However, in actually composing the text, one will also need to adopt an epistemic approach, for example when selecting between different possible ideas for inclusion and between different ways of expressing them, both in order to create the most effective structure of meaning for one's purpose and to take account of the likely needs and expectations of one's audience. Finally, in editing one's text, one will approach the text performatively, giving explicit attention to the conventions of spelling, punctuation and other matters related to the written code.

Literacy, then, is not one, undifferentiated, set of skills that can be applied to any text under all conditions. On the contrary, it comprises a wide range of differentiated practices, many of which are restricted to particular occupational, cultural or social groups. Nobody can be expected to master all these practices, nor would it be useful to attempt to do so. At the same time, I have suggested, underlying these specific practices is a repertoire of ways of approaching texts, and the procedures and strategies associated with them, on which a literate person draws in order to meet the specific demands of particular literacy events. Such a view can help us to understand how children from different cultural backgrounds may, from their experience within their communities, develop quite different models of literacy. It may also help us, as teachers, to set goals for literacy learning in school and provide a basis for identifying the sort of literacy experiences that we should provide in the classroom to enable individuals to build on and extend the models they have constructed at home.[3]

In a multicultural society such as ours there can be no universally valid definition of literacy that is couched in terms of particular practices or content, since the practices that are considered important and the content that is valued varies from

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[3] See, for example, Heath, S.B. *Ways with Words*, Cambridge University Press, 1983; and chapters in H. Goelman, A. Oberg and F. Smith (eds.) *Awakening to Literacy*, Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann Educational Books, 1984.

one cultural group to another. Nevertheless, I believe that, within any cultural group, to be literate is, in general, *to have the disposition to engage with texts of different types in ways appropriate to empower acting, thinking, and feeling in the context of purposeful social activity.*[4] From an educational point of view, then, our goal must be to ensure that all students acquire a repertoire of general procedures and strategies, learned from engaging in the particular practices that are valued in the communities of home and school, so that they are enabled to participate in the social activities that are of importance to them, now and in their envisaged futures. But because neither we nor they can know what literacy practices they will need to master in the future, we must ensure that the strategies they acquire are both broad-based and generative. In particular, they need to gain control of all five of the ways of approaching texts that were described above.

The conception of literacy as a repertoire of ways of approaching texts which is outlined here has, of course, been implicitly recognized in both East and West for more than two thousand years, where it has also been the basis for the education of the elite class of scholars and administrators. Now, however, it is coming to be seen as a goal for universal education, but one which is very far from being universally achieved.[5] The question we must ask, therefore, is what sort of pedagogical practices might enable such a vision of universal full literacy to become a reality?

Before we can address the pedagogical question, though, we must first consider the nature of knowledge and the role that literacy plays in its development.

Literacy and the Construction of Knowledge

In recent years, there has been much talk of "the knowledge explosion", as more and more information is generated, particularly in the fields of science and technology. From such talk, it is easy to assume -- as many people do -- that "knowledge" exists in some material form, independent of particular individuals who know. It is "out there", waiting to be acquired, just like other commodities that can be manufactured, accumulated, or bought and sold. It is probably the proliferation of physical texts -- rows of books on library shelves, successive issues of journals, or expanding data-bases on computer disks -- that has given rise to this belief. However, such a belief is completely erroneous. Knowledge is not an object; nor is it contained in books, journals, or disks. Instead, it is a mental state: "the state or

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4 Wells, G. *op. cit.*

5 Bereiter, C. and Scardamalia, M. "An attainable version of high literacy: approaches to teaching higher order skills in reading and writing". *Curriculum Inquiry*, 17:9-30, 1987; Resnick, D.P. and Resnick, L.B. "The nature of literacy: an historical exploration". *Harvard Educational Review*, 47(3): 370-385, 1977.

condition of understanding, acquired by learning", as the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines it.

Being a mental state, knowledge can only exist in the mind of an individual knower. And it has to be constructed by each individual through a process of making sense of new information in the light of what he or she already knows. Throughout our lives, each one of us is constantly constructing and extending a mental model of the world, as we interpret the data that reaches us through our senses in the light of the theories and hypotheses that constitute our current model. Much of this mental activity is carried out in the interest of action; and, in order to act more effectively, we may deliberately seek out new and relevant information. Sometimes, however, we reflect on what we know in order to assess our understanding of a particular topic; it is at these moments, as we make connections between separate items of information, note gaps and inconsistencies and try to overcome them, that we most deliberately and systematically construct our knowledge and modify and extend our mental model of the world.

Whether undertaken incidentally or deliberately, however, our knowledge building is always personal. This must be so, since it results from a transaction between new information and what we can bring to bear in order to make sense of it. And what we bring to bear is always a selection from what we already know, as a result of all our previous transactions, that is foregrounded by our purpose in the present moment.

However, this does not mean that we are locked in a private mental world, uninfluenced by others or unable to influence them. From our earliest moments, interaction with other people provides the context for, and often the content of, a substantial proportion of our transactions with the world around us. It is other people, as much as it is the physical world, that is the source of the information from which we construct our knowledge. And it is in discourse with others that we have an opportunity to formulate what we understand, thereby coming to understand it better. It is in discourse, too, that we receive feedback on these formulations which enables us to modify our personal knowledge to bring it into greater conformity with that of other people. So, although all knowledge is ultimately and inevitably personal, in practice there is a great deal of commonality in the knowledge that is constructed by members of particular cultural communities. It is this that enables us to talk about "common" knowledge and to act as if it had an independent, impersonal, existence.

From these observations about the nature of knowledge, it seems to me, a number of important implications can be drawn. First, since education is about creating the conditions for individual students to construct their own knowledge, a conception of schooling as knowledge-transmission is both inappropriate and anti-educational. Learners do not necessarily make the sense that teachers expect of the

information that is presented to them. In fact, what teachers or texts tell will almost certainly be reconstructed by listeners or readers in a wide variety of different forms, depending on what they bring to the learning transaction. And unless there is an opportunity for learners to tell back what they have understood, the mismatch may never be known. But, more importantly, it is in the discourse itself that the real business of knowledge construction occurs, as each tries to understand the other and both build meaning together. Instead of transmission, therefore, education needs to be thought of as transaction, in which learners are assisted in various ways to construct their own knowledge and to calibrate their constructions with those of others.

Secondly, we are forced to reconsider traditional notions of truth and authority as these apply to what is taught in schools. Even where we are dealing with "public" knowledge, all that can be claimed is that, within a particular culture, many individuals have found that the knowledge they have constructed on the basis of their transactions with the social and physical world around them has been either verified against their personal experience or found to be in conformity with the expressions of knowledge by others. Certainly it cannot mean true in any absolute or final sense, since, as we have already seen, every individual's knowledge is constantly subject to modification and revision and, as the history of science or any other discipline shows, what is taken to be secure knowledge in one generation is supplanted in the next, as new theories are constructed which are judged, within that community, to give better explanations of the available evidence.

Thirdly, this view of knowledge must also lead us to reconsider the nature of text. Earlier, I rejected the view that knowledge is contained in texts on the grounds that what is represented, in the form of marks on a page or some formal equivalent, is only meaningful to a reader who has both a mastery of the conventions of the code in which the text is written and, more importantly, the relevant existing knowledge to be able to interpret what is represented by the graphic display. That is to say, knowledge is what the reader constructs if he or she is able to transact effectively with the text. However, in the light of the preceding discussion, it also has to be emphasized that no text should be accorded the status of being the true and authoritative statement on any topic. Any text must have been written by a particular individual and, however knowledgeable that individual was, the actual text can be no more than one possible formulation of what he or she might have written on the basis of what he or she understood at that point in his or her life. Any text, therefore, must be seen as no more than a *tentative and provisional representation of an individual writer's understanding at the time of writing*. Furthermore, as has become clear from recent work in literary theory, since different readers bring different knowledge and personal experience to the text and read with different purposes and preconceptions, there can be no one, correct, interpretation. It becomes more than ever important, therefore, for readers to discuss their interpretations with each other, considering alternatives and seeking to justify them by reference to the

text itself and to the assumptions that each reader made in arriving at his or her interpretation.

From these arguments, it will now be clear why I placed such emphasis on the epistemic mode of engagement with texts. Certainly, it is important to be able to engage with texts in order to facilitate action, to obtain or communicate information, and to enter into imaginative worlds created through words. However, it is when texts are used as a means for the construction of knowledge -- the achievement of increased understanding about a topic of importance to us -- that literacy achieves its full potential. For whilst it is the permanence of the physical form of the text that allows it to be reread on many occasions by many different readers, it is the tentative and provisional nature of the meaning that the text represents, and the invitation it offers to the reader/writer to transact with it through critical interrogation and possible revision, that gives literacy its potential to be, in Bruner's words, a technology for the empowerment of mind.

The Early Acquisition of Literacy

Having established the contribution of literacy to the construction of knowledge, we now need to consider how literacy itself is acquired. Here we are helped by the substantial amount of research that has been conducted in recent years into what has come to be called "emergent literacy". Building on the naturalistic studies of language development carried out in the 70s and 80s,[6] this researchhas explored the emergence of literate behaviours and understanding in the preschool years before children have received any systematic instruction. What it has found can be briefly summarized as follows.

Where children grow up in a literate culture, they form representations of how written language works and of the purposes it serves which are progressively constructed and modified as they actively make sense of the literacy events they experience. By the time they go to school, all children have developed a model of written language which can provide the basis for further learning. In broad outline, the processes through which this learning takes place are very similar to those involved in learning to talk: children do not require instruction, but they do need opportunities for participation in joint literacy events with other more mature members of the culture. Attention to environmental print (signs, advertizing logos, labels on tins and packets) provides occasions for learning about written language which are available to all children; more specific activities such as constructing and using a shopping list, sending and receiving cards and letters and, in particular,

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6 See, for example, Brown, R. *A First Language*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973; Wells, G. *The Meaning Makers*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1986.

shared story reading have been found to provide even richer opportunities but ones which are not experienced by all children.[7]

The picture of literacy development that emerges from this research is very much in accord with current theories of early learning more generally, which emphasize both the active and constructive nature of the child's intellectual development and its social basis.

Children learn most effectively through participation in meaningful joint activities in which their performance is assisted and guided by a more competent member of the culture. Such an "apprenticeship" model of learning is, of course an extension of the theory of the relationship between learning and teaching developed by Vygotsky, which emphasizes both the social origins of higher mental functions in the practices of the culture, and the role of parents and teachers in providing opportunities for the learner to participate in these practices and, by so doing, gradually to appropriate those mental functions through demonstration, guided participation and task-related talk.[8]

The processes through which the mental functions associated with literacy are acquired, and in particular the procedures and strategies required to be able to engage with texts in the epistemic mode, can be seen as a paradigm example of what Vygotsky called "learning in the zone of proximal development", or what was referred to as "apprenticeship" above. However, unlike such physical activities as cooking or carpentry, the activities involved in engaging with a text are largely internal and therefore invisible. The only way in which children can come to appreciate what people do when they are reading or writing, therefore, is if a more expert reader or writer engages with the learner in some joint literacy event and both verbalizes what he or she is thinking as they read or write the text together and explains how the way in which they are approaching the text relates to the purpose they have in mind.[9]

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7 Good surveys of this research are provided by Hall, N. *The Emergence of Literacy*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1987; and Teale, W.H. and Sulzby, E. (eds.) *Emergent Literacy*, Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1986.

8 Vygotsky, L.S. *Mind in Society*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press, 1978; Cole, M. "The zone of proximal development: where culture and cognition create each other". In J.V. Wertsch (ed.) *Culture, Communication, and Cognition: Vygotskian Perspectives, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.*

9 Wells, G., op. cit.

In the preschool years, such shared events can occur quite naturally in the course of everyday activities, such as planning TV viewing, writing a card to a relative or a note for a family member, ordering items from a catalogue, as well as in reading a story together. In all these cases, the relationship of the text to the participants' purpose is apparent in the context of the activity. If the enactment of this purpose is also accompanied by an oral rendering of the text as it is being read or written, together with comments and explanations which relate the words and phrases in the text to the participants' extra-textual experience, the child is able to "see" what is involved in engaging with a text in this way and gradually begins to perform both the external and internal activities for him or herself. The same basic principles, I would argue, should underlie the teaching of literacy in school.

Literacy Learning in School

With this conception in mind of the potential of literacy and of its central role in education, together with an idea of what happens in the early stages of literacy learning, we can return to the question about the sort of pedagogical practices that will enable all children to become fully literate.

In attempting to answer this question, let me begin by rejecting categorically a curriculum based on a simplistic conversion of the model presented in the first section of this paper into a temporally ordered progression through the five modes of engaging with text. What is required is not a sequence of instruction that starts with the performative approach to texts, nods in the direction of the functional and the re-creational, and moves on in the junior years to concentrate on (and often terminate in) the informational -- although this seems to be what is believed by a high proportion of educators and by the policy makers, who set the goals for literacy instruction. (In this view, the epistemic approach, if it is considered at all, is seen as appropriate only for those who have already mastered all the prerequisite information for forming a personal opinion on a topic -- a state unlikely to be reached before graduate school, and perhaps not even then.)

By contrast, the answer I wish to propose is that an adequate education in literacy should give attention to all five approaches to text, both in reading and in writing, and should do so *from the very earliest grades*. Nevertheless, within this overall framework, it is the epistemic approach, with its emphasis on the deployment and development of critical thinking skills, which should be set as the major goal. Every curricular unit should involve tasks that require students to engage with texts in this way and this applies to students of all ability levels and from every type of background.

Put in these terms, this may seem a goal that is only appropriate to older students. However, the preschool studies referred to above show that children's responses to the "environmental texts" around them and to the stories that are read to them, and also their own self-initiated attempts at writing, encompass all five approaches, at least in an embryonic form.[10] The same can also be true in the primary grades. When the text, their own or another's, is of significance for their own lives, children want to understand and be understood, and they will often engage the help of others to make sure that they achieve this goal, within their capabilities. The same has been found to be true of many older students with learning difficulties: when the text that they are reading or writing is of importance to them, they are anxious to develop the strategies they need to achieve their purpose and they often demonstrate abilities for critical thinking that, from their performance in less motivating situations, they were assumed to lack.[11]

However, for such real engagement with texts to occur, children have to be treated as readers and writers from the beginning of formal instruction. As the preschool research has shown, all children have developed some degree of knowledge about literacy by the time they enter school; they have also developed strategies for reading and writing that enable them to engage in these activities, although not yet in a mature manner. What is essential, therefore, is that teachers take pains to discover the nature of each child's knowledge and accept it as the basis on which he or she can build further and more adult-like knowledge. As was emphasized above, all learning involves a transaction between new information and what the learner brings to the task by way of existing knowledge. If we ignore or, still worse, reject what the child already knows, and offer instruction which makes no connection with that knowledge, we make the learning task more difficult and run the risk of disabling many potentially successful learners.

Just as important is to ensure that literacy learning is embedded within contexts of meaningful and purposeful activity. All too often children are expected to learn to read and write from seatwork, carried out individually and in silence, which has no purpose beyond its own completion. But this is completely contrary to the way literacy functions outside the classroom, where engagement with a text is always a means to the achievement of some further end. When we cut reading and writing off from real-life purposes, we render these activities sterile and unmotivating. On the other hand, when the texts that the students work on contribute to some goal that they feel is their own -- such as creating a class

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10 See, in particular, Harste, J., Woodward, V. and Burke, C. *Language Stories and Literacy Lessons*, Heinemann Educational Books, 1984.

11 Chang, G.L. and Wells, G. "Concepts of literacy and their consequences for children's potential as learners". In SP. Norris & L.M. Phillips (eds.) *Foundations of Literacy Policy in Canada*, Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., in press.

newspaper, conducting a science fair for other classes, writing and performing a play based on a story they have been reading -- students find themselves having to engage with these texts epistemically as well as in other appropriate ways in order to achieve the goals that they themselves have set. Put slightly differently, the literate abilities we wish them to develop will be learned most effectively when they are integrated with other areas of the curriculum and not attended to only within separately time-tabled periods. Indeed, from this point of view, there is much to be said for abolishing Language Arts as a separate subject altogether and emphasizing the essential role that reading, writing, talking and thinking play in *all* areas of the curriculum.

A further point that needs to be emphasized in this context is the inherently social nature of literacy. As well as providing a medium for the construction of knowledge, texts also function as a means of communication. The practice of demanding that reading and writing be engaged in alone and in silence is therefore counter-productive. As readers, we want to compare our interpretations of what we have read with those of others and, as writers, we want feedback from our intended audience on what we are planning or what we have already written. "We don't know what we think about a book until we've talked about it", commented an eight-year-old,[12] and it is often in this talk that students find they achieve their greatest understanding, as they listen to the opinions of others and struggle to express their own in a form that will be clear and cogent enough to be convincing to their peers. Ideally, therefore, every classroom should be seen as an interpretive community, in which texts of all kinds are discussed and debated, as well as read and written.

But it is not only in making sense of the content of a text that interaction with others is important. Interaction also provides the medium through which the procedures -- or, as some would call them, the skills -- involved in literate activities are acquired. This applies as much in school as it does in the preschool years. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how an individual would learn to read critically, to consider alternative interpretations, or to revise his or her own text in order to make it more coherent or more easily understood by a reader, without experiencing these strategies made "visible" in the course of engaging with texts epistemically in the company of a more mature reader and writer. Unless there are opportunities for this sort of collaborative talk about texts as a regular part of the school curriculum, students may learn to perform the more observable aspects of reading and writing and still fail to understand how these behaviours may empower action, thinking and feeling in their personal lives as well as in the tasks they are required to perform in the classroom.

Finally, in considering literacy learning in school, we should not define texts

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12 Quoted by Aidan Chambers in *Booktalk*, p. 138, Bodley Head, 1985.

so narrowly that other forms of symbolic representation, such as drawings, diagrams, three-dimensional models, etc. are excluded from the domain of literacy. As an aid to the construction and interpretation of meaning, any mode of symbolic representation that enables thought to be captured in a permanent form that can be revisited and revised functions in essentially the same way as a written text. Equally, conversation about such representations, by focusing two or more minds on a close consideration of what is meant, is likely to promote the sort of literate thinking that I have argued should be the major goal of literacy education.[13]

Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

For too long, schools have been dominated by an overly simple conception of literacy as a hierarchy of print-related skills which, once mastered, can be applied by solitary individuals to all types of text in a relatively undifferentiated manner. By contrast, I have argued, the emphasis should be placed on the diversity of purposes that written language serves and on the need to acquire a repertoire of ways of approaching texts to meet these varied purposes. In particular, I have stressed the importance of being able to adopt an epistemic approach to texts, for it is in critically reflecting on and revising texts that the potential of literacy for enhancing thinking is most fully realized. At the same time I have emphasized the inherently social nature of literacy and argued for the importance of opportunities to talk about texts in interaction with others, both in order to clarify what one thinks and also as a means of encountering and making one's own the mental activities of more skilled readers and writers. In sum, literacy involves the orchestration of thinking, talking and doing, as well as reading and writing, in the construction and interpretation of meaning through engagement with texts.

For students to have such learning opportunities, however, requires more than a change in the mandated curriculum. Indeed, to try to bring about educational change by administrative action without involving teachers as agents in the determination of what needs to be changed, and how, is most unlikely to be successful.[14] If classrooms are to become communities of active learners, therefore, in which students engage in literate thinking as they pursue inquiries on topics that they find personally meaningful, the teachers who provide the leadership and guidance in such classrooms must themselves have similar learning opportunities. That is to say, they too must be encouraged to become active and collaborative learners in the professional community of which they are members. They, too, need to carry out inquiries in their own classrooms about student learning and the

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13 Chang, G.L. and Wells, G. "The literate potential of collaborative talk". In M. MacLure, T. Phillips and A. Wilkinson (eds.) *Oracy Matters*, Milton Keynes, U.K.: Open University Press, 1988.

14 Fullan, M. *The Meaning of Change, OISE Press, 1982.*

classroom conditions and practices which most effectively facilitate it, and to share the results of these inquiries with their colleagues in a collaborative attempt to create a better curriculum for the particular students for whom they are responsible. In so doing, of course, they will be demonstrating their own commitment to literate thinking, as they critically examine and interpret texts from their own classrooms (for example, samples of students' work, anecdotal records they have written while observing students, video and audio recordings, transcripts of student and teacher talk), and create texts of their own as they seek to understand the evidence they have collected and communicate that understanding to others.

That teachers are willing and able to take on this new role, if given the necessary support and encouragement, was demonstrated by some of those who were involved in the research that my colleagues and I have been conducting in schools serving multicultural neighbourhoods in Toronto.[15] It is also attested to by the increasing number of publications in which teachers report the inquiries they have carried out and the changes they have made, both to the content of their curriculum and the manner in which they teach it, in the light of what they have learned.[16] Perhaps even more impressive, however, are the testimonies that these reports contain of the empowering effect on the authors themselves of having become active learners and literate thinkers in their own classrooms and schools.

But for this grass roots movement to gather strength and to bring about change in a schoolwide rather than simply an individual teacher basis requires a fundamental shift in the administrative organization of the educational system as a whole. What is needed is for administrators to relinquish their powers of central control and direction, and to reconceptualize their role as one of creating and supporting collegial structures at the level of individual schools, in which teachers are encouraged to share the responsibility for educational planning and decisionmaking and given the resources, guidance and support that will enable them to engage in the self-determined learning and professional development that will equip them effectively to take on this responsibility. It is only when leadership at the upper levels in the system is practised in the form of assisting and guiding the learning

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15 Wells, G., Chang, G.L. and Maher, A. "Creating classroom communities of literate thinkers." In S. Sharan (ed.) *Cooperative Learning: Theory and Research*, New York: Praeger, 1990; Wells, G. et al. *Language and Learning: Learners, Teachers and Researchers at Work*, Vols 1-4, Ontario Ministry of Education, in press.

16 See, for example, articles in *Language Arts*; Atwell, N. (ed.) *Coming to Know: Writing to Learn in the Intermediate Grades*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1989; Goswami, D. and Stillman, P. (eds.) *Reclaiming the Classroom: Teacher Research as an Agency for Change*, Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1987; Newman, J. (ed.) *Finding Our Own Way*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1989; Pinnell, G.S. and Matline, M.L. *Teachers and Research: Language Learning in the Classroom*, Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1989.

endeavours of teachers as they work together to bring about school improvement,[17] that those teachers, in turn, will be able to create the learning opportunities in their classrooms to empower their students to become self-motivated, active learners and literate thinkers. For, as nearly every teacher-researcher notes, "it is his or her behaviour as a researcher, a learner, a questioner, and a writer that really teaches the student how to learn".[18]

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17 Tharp, R. and Gallimore, R. *Rousing Minds to Life*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

18 Mohr, M.M. and MacLean, M.S. *Working Together: A Guide for Teacher-Researchers*, Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1987.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL LITERACY NEEDS

IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN

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INTRODUCTION

The major urban centres in Canada are receiving increasing numbers of recently arrived immigrant and refugee students. In the North York Board alone, the past several years have seen an annual intake of upwards of 6,000 students who have just entered Canada. These figures do not include the large numbers of children of kindergarten age entering school for the first time who come from a language background other than English or French.

These students are by no means a homogeneous group. In terms of literacy, at least three sub-groups can be identified:

- children who come from societies where literacy is not established, or is restricted to a relatively small percentage of the population (refugees from some parts of Africa and South-East Asia would fall into this category)

- children who come from literate societies but have not yet themselves developed literacy skills in any language (some children from Central America whose access to quality schooling has been restricted because of internal strife have few, if any, literacy skills on entry into Canada)

- children who come from literate societies and who are already as literate in their mother tongue -- or the language in which they have been schooled -- as any child of similar age would likely be.

PROGRAMMING PRINCIPLES

The children in the third category are the ones who move with the greatest ease into print using English, though it is by no means certain exactly what skills or strategies already learned allow for this "transfer" to their second language (Cummins, 1984, Hakuta, 1985). Those in the first two groups do not differ markedly from children from English-speaking backgrounds who are just beginning to learn to

read and write. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the same principles apply. They can be summarized as follows:

- connect with home uses of literacy -- try to find out what functions, if any, literacy has within the home and encourage parents to share these uses of print with their children

- always present material to learners in a clear context -- establishing a backdrop and purpose for every reading and writing activity enables children to link language forms with specific functions

- remember that getting meaning from reading involves bringing meaning to reading -- children must have the appropriate "cultural scripts" to approach a particular reading text

- build up a knowledge of the English language system with a particular focus on how written English operates (Wallace, 1986).

PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE

Two examples of literacy-building activities which incorporate these principles were described in some detail. The first was a group retelling of the Little Red Riding Hood story, suitably updated with a grandma who lived in an elegant highrise in New York and a terrorist substitute for the wolf. The audience for the story were the three other groups within the class, each of which had created a unique version of the same topic and the children in a similar program in the U.S. who reciprocated by sharing their productions. The other was a student-produced tabloid, entitled *Newcomer Views*, which involved writing a wide variety of styles from editorials to classified ads, arguing over which pieces, visuals as well as written items, should be selected for inclusion, editing using word-processing, discussing layout and, after printing and distribution, reading the entire paper.

Both of these extended activities provided strong visual support which is a key factor in aiding comprehension among learners of a second language; they were closely linked to the students' previous experience; they employed plenty of modelling and scaffolding; they encouraged learning by talking and learning by doing; they encouraged students at different stages of acquiring both oral and written English to interact with, and learn from, each other. Perhaps most importantly of all, they engaged students' interest and, therefore, their minds.

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LES ÉLÈVES AYANT DES BESOINS SPÉCIAUX EN MATIÈRE D'ALPHABÉTISATION

LES ÉLÈVES DES PROGRAMMES GÉNÉRAUX ET FONDAMENTAUX

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INTRODUCTION

Je voudrais tout d'abord vous dire tout le plaisir que j'ai à me retrouver ici aujourd'hui. Mais je dois vous avouer cependant que ce plaisir est un peu entremêlé de craintes. J'ai en effet été un peu perplexe quand les organisateurs de ce colloque m'ont demandé de traiter du problème de l'alphabétisation chez les élèves des programmes généraux et fondamentaux. Perplexe, parce que, d'une part il me paraissait qu'un chercheur universitaire chevronné serait sans doute plus en mesure que moi de traiter froidement de ce problème et de ses solutions et ce avec multes statistiques à l'appui. Par contre, il faut bien admettre que cette question m'a toujours passionné et m'intéresse toujours profondément.

J'ai en effet débuté ma carrière dans l'enseignement précisément auprès de ces élèves, et par la suite, j'ai été en mesure de réfléchir à ce type de problème alors que, comme Directeur des programmes d'études au ministère de l'Éducation du Nouveau-Brunswick, j'ai été amené à participer à l'élaboration d'une réforme du système scolaire secondaire au Nouveau-Brunswick et, enfin, parce qu'actuellement, dans le poste que j'occupe, j'assume la responsabilité administrative de quatre collèges communautaires francophones, qui chez nous livrent les programmes d'alphabétisation aux adultes, en plus d'être co-président du comité exécutif de la Stratégie-jeunesse, une initiative assez unique au Canada, puisqu'elle regroupe les efforts de cinq ministères provinciaux, dont celui de l'Éducation, et du ministère fédéral de l'Emploi et de l'Immigration.

Si je vous dis ceci, ce n'est par pour tenter de vous impressionner avec mon curriculum vitae. Je suis bien conscient que ces choses n'impressionnent personne sauf peut-être ma mère, et encore! C'est plutôt pour vous mettre en garde du fait que je ne traiterai pas de ce sujet de manière théorique. Ma présentation se voudrait plutôt le fruit de réflexions que m'ont fournies un certain nombre d'expériences pratiques. De plus, ces réflexions s'appliquent d'avantage à ma province, le Nouveau-

Brunswick, et ce sera à vous de juger si elles s'appliquent dans votre milieu, puisque je ne connais que bien imparfaitement les systèmes scolaires des autres provinces canadiennes. Mon intuition me dit cependant que certaines réalités dépassent largement les frontières du Nouveau-Brunswick.

L'autre aspect qui m'inquiète un peu, c'est d'avoir à traiter de ce sujet sous l'angle de l'alphabétisation. Tout le monde sait que c'est l'Année internationale de l'alphabétisation, que toutes les associations qui s'intéressent de près ou de loin à l'éducation, organiseront cette année «leur» colloque sur le sujet, que nous serons tous littéralement bombardés d'opinions, inondés de jugements et de réflexions plus ou moins éclairés sur le sujet. «L'alphabétisation» prend l'allure de «charité de l'année» ...et c'est là, à mon avis, que les choses se compliquent, parce que, comme c'est toujours le cas des sujets qu'on galvaude trop, les opinions, les jugements et les solutions simplistes prennent parfois le dessus. Je vais donc tenter d'éviter ce piège, tout en étant conscient qu'il me guette à chaque pas.

Enfin, ma troisième préoccupation découle du fait d'avoir à traiter du thème de l'alphabétisation au niveau scolaire et ce à des enseignantes et des enseignants. C'est un peu jouer avec le feu... Je suis bien conscient de marcher sur la corde raide, sachant que dès qu'on parle du problème de l'alphabétisation chez les jeunes, le milieu scolaire a tendance à devenir nerveux et à se sentir placé au banc des accusés. Il faut bien dire qu'actuellement les accusations pleuvent d'un peu partout... Mais, ici encore, je tenterai de ne pas me laisser aller aux accusations trop faciles et souvent injustes. Je n'ai pas entièrement oublié mes années d'enseignement. Par ailleurs, il serait dangereux pour les enseignantes et les enseignants eux-mêmes de se livrer à des analyses trop complaisantes de ce problème.

Voilà! Ayant partagé très honnêtement avec vous les craintes qui m'assaillent aujourd'hui, je me sens maintenant plus à l'aise de traiter du sujet qu'on me propose : «L'alphabétisation et les élèves des programmes généraux et fondamentaux».

I - LE PROBLÈME

Avant de proposer remède à un mal, il est primordial tout d'abord d'en faire un diagnostic aussi précis que possible. Dans le cas du problème qui nous intéresse aujourd'hui, il est important d'en définir les termes et les paramètres. C'est pourquoi je voudrais vous proposer tout d'abord de réfléchir quelque peu sur les trois réalités qui composent l'ensemble de la problématique sur laquelle nous nous penchons, à savoir :

1) Alphabétisation, 2) Programmes généraux et fondamentaux et enfin 3) Les élèves qui fréquentent ces programmes.

1) Alphabétisation

Si tout le monde semble d'accord pour dire que l'analphabétisme est un problème qui coûte chaque année des milliards de dollars à l'économie canadienne et qui cause quotidiennement d'énormes problèmes humains auprès de ceux et celles qui en sont affectés, ce beau consensus disparaît dès qu'on tente d'en définir le sens et la portée.

En effet, si l'on s'entend généralement pour dire qu'une personne est alphabétisée lorsqu'elle a suffisamment de connaissances de base, particulièrement en lecture, en écriture et en mathématiques pour pouvoir fonctionner efficacement dans son milieu, il faut bien se rendre compte qu'il s'agit là d'une définition conjoncturelle, donc **mouvante**[1]. L'alphabétisation est donc fonction des connaissances exigées dans un contexte déterminé, en d'autres mots du milieu dans lequel on évolue.

Si l'on a parfois l'impression que l'analphabétisme est un problème nouveau au Canada, problème qu'on avait cru, une fois pour toutes, réglé avec la démocratisation de l'enseignement public, c'est précisément parce que notre réalité sociale et économique est en pleine transformation. Ce qui suffisait hier, ne suffit plus aujourd'hui.

C'est ici que le problème devient inquiétant. Avec l'omniprésence de la haute technologie, et ce phénomène ne fait que débuter, les citoyens auront à utiliser des habiletés intellectuelles de plus en plus complexes et qui exigeront des connaissances de plus en plus nombreuses et approfondies. Si cette réalité affecte également les personnes d'un certain âge, c'est cependant les jeunes, et surtout les jeunes défavorisés, qui risquent d'être les plus touchés par cette évolution du seuil de l'alphabétisme.

D'autre part, il est actuellement difficile de mesurer avec exactitude l'étendue du problème. Les statistiques sont, la plupart du temps, fragmentaires et basées sur des prémisses souvent douteuses. Ce qu'on sait cependant, c'est que le problème existe à une échelle insoupçonnée, il y a à peine quelques années, et que le problème de l'analphabétisme existe même chez les jeunes ayant profité des grandes réformes «démocratisantes» des années soixante.

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1 Thomas, Audrey M. «Le coût social et économique de l'analphabétisme». Perspectives, Vol. XIX, n° 4, Unesco, 1989.

Il y a à peine un an et demi, venant de quitter mon poste de directeur des programmes d'études au ministère de l'Éducation pour prendre les fonctions que j'occupe actuellement, j'ai été estomaqué de constater le nombre de jeunes que l'on retrouvait dans les programmes d'alphabétisation. Ce fut là pour moi une révélation... Jamais je n'aurais soupçonné l'étendue du problème.

À peu près au même moment, à l'automne de 1988, le secrétariat fédéral de la Jeunesse et le gouvernement du Nouveau-Brunswick, inquiets par la difficulté que semblaient rencontrer les jeunes à effectuer le passage de l'école au marché du travail, créaient par le biais d'une entente fédérale-provinciale de 70 millions de dollars, un programme appelé «Stratégie jeunesse». Cette Stratégie vise à fournir aux jeunes, de 16 à 24 ans, qu'ils soient décrocheurs, réels ou potentiels, chômeurs, contrevenants, handicapés ou autres, des services de counselling et des programmes de rattrapage, de support, d'encouragement à la poursuite d'études postsecondaires et de préparation au marché du travail. Les structures et les programmes de cette stratégie sont en place depuis près d'un an et ont profité jusqu'à maintenant à au-delà de 10 000 jeunes.

Or, cette première année d'opération démontre que plus de la moitié de ces jeunes n'ont jamais terminé leurs études secondaires et que près du tiers sont fonctionnellement analphabètes. Alors que l'on avait cru porter nos efforts sur des programmes de maintien à l'école et sur des programmes de formation techniques et technologiques postsecondaires, il a fallu bien vite mettre en place des programmes d'alphabétisation et de recyclage académique pour ces jeunes laissés-pour-compte. Ce problème est d'autant plus sérieux que l'on constate qu'au Nouveau-Brunswick :

- les jeunes de 15 à 24 ans ayant quitté l'école, connaissent un taux de chômage de 20 à 25 %, taux qui est de cinq à dix points supérieur à l'ensemble du Canada

- qu'en juillet 1988, 17 000 jeunes de 15 à 24 ans étaient en chômage

- que le taux de chômage est de 72 % supérieur chez les jeunes qui n'ont pas terminé leurs études secondaires

- que la clientèle de l'aide sociale compte environ 8 900 prestataires de 16 à 21 ans et que seulement 10 % d'entre eux ont terminé leurs études secondaires

- que 49 % des jeunes contrevenants (16 à 17 ans) et 36 % des contrevenants de 18 à 21 ans ont un niveau de scolarité inférieur à la huitième année et que 90 % de l'ensemble des contrevenants étaient en chômage au moment de leurs démêlés avec la justice

- et enfin, que 49 % des jeunes de 16 à 24 ans qui sont traités en raison de problèmes liés à l'alcool ou à la drogue ont moins d'une neuvième année de scolarité.

Ces statistiques étaient pour nous d'autant plus inquiétantes que le taux d'abandon scolaire était encore supérieur à 30 % dans plusieurs des écoles secondaires de la province, soit un total de plus de 3 000 élèves par année. Il fallait donc absolument arrêter cette hémorragie.

Le problème de l'analphabétisme chez les jeunes est donc un problème sérieux au Canada. Ce problème est encore plus grave dans les régions défavorisées. Il mérite donc qu'on s'y intéresse et qu'on y trouve le plus rapidement possible des solutions, sans quoi nous risquons d'en payer le prix par de graves crises sociales et économiques.

2) Les programmes généraux et fondamentaux

Je mentionnais plus haut que l'on a cru pendant un certain temps que la démocratisation de l'école publique et l'obligation légale de fréquenter l'école règleraient, une fois pour toutes, les problèmes d'alphabétisation. On se rend compte aujourd'hui que c'est précisément l'accès à l'éducation de populations qui en étaient exclues auparavant, qui entraîne les problèmes d'alphabétisation en milieu scolaire. Le rapport de la Commission des communautés européennes sur la lutte contre l'analphabétisme[2], publié en 1988, concluait que les enseignants n'étaient pas formés pour faire face aux problèmes d'enfants défavorisés, ils ont de ce fait centrés leurs efforts sur les meilleurs élèves, alors que les autres ont été dirigés vers d'autres filières où ils avaient peu de chances de progresser. Ce constat nous amène à parler des fameux programmes dits généraux et fondamentaux. Les termes varient d'une province à l'autre, mais portent généralement comme titre des euphémismes qui cachent plus ou moins bien ce qu'ils sont vraiment : des programmes allégés.

Ceci étant dit, vous aurez deviné très rapidement ma réaction première à l'égard de ces programmes. J'ai, en effet, toujours été profondément allergique à ces «voies» ou types de programmes qui circonviennent le plus souvent le véritable problème des jeunes en difficulté d'apprentissage et qui mènent plus souvent qu'autrement à la «voie de garage» ou, si vous préférez, au chômage. On a ainsi contribué à reproduire à l'intérieur des écoles publiques de véritables «classes sociales». Alors que ces jeunes, provenant le plus souvent de milieux défavorisés, auraient eu, encore plus que les autres, besoin de la rigueur, de la richesse et de la diversité des programmes et de l'enseignement réservés aux élèves du «régulier», on a plutôt opté pour les isoler dans des classes dites «homogènes» où ils n'avaient pour exemple que d'autres enfants défavorisés et que pour encadrement, des programmes d'études anémiques et des enseignants souvent moins expérimentés et moins bien

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[2] Commission des communautés européennes, Rapport sur la lutte contre l'analphabétisme, Europe sociale, Bruxelles, 1988.

préparés pédagogiquement à relever ce défi. Comme personne ne voulait vraiment enseigner à ces groupes d'élèves, les derniers arrivés se voyaient le plus souvent confier cette tâche!

Pour ma part, je me rappellerai longtemps ma désillusion et mon désarroi, lorsqu'à ma première année d'enseignement, frais émoulu des amphithéâtres universitaires et des longues heures de travail solitaire en bibliothèque, je me suis retrouvé, sans expérience, sans préparation particulière, sans programme vraiment défini, à enseigner du français à des groupes d'élèves de «Niveau 3» comme on les appelait alors chez nous. Et ce, du seul fait que j'étais le dernier arrivé dans le département.

Il faut dire également que traditionnellement le «régime pédagogique» réservé à ces élèves était généralement fort mince, en particulier à l'égard des matières dites académiques comme le français et les mathématiques.

Mais voilà que je me laisse emporter par mes émotions et par ma propre expérience. Je décris sans doute un portrait trop noir de cette situation. Les choses ont changé au cours des dernières années, les programmes ont été mieux définis, les enseignants ont reçu des formations mieux adaptées à ce genre d'enseignement et les régimes pédagogiques ont été quelque peu redéfinis et enrichis. Mais je crois, quand même, qu'il y a encore un fond de vrai dans ce que je décris.

Il faut dire, à la décharge des systèmes scolaires et des enseignants que le problème est complexe et que les pressions sont énormes. On n'a pas toujours donné, non plus, le support et les instruments qu'il aurait fallu aux enseignants de ces programmes. Les problèmes que rencontrent ces clientèles sont fort complexes et les solutions ne sont pas simples. Mais il faut bien constater que les problèmes d'alphabétisation sont particulièrement élevés chez ces élèves et que c'est à ces niveaux qu'on rencontre la plupart des décrocheurs.

3) Les élèves

Enfin, pour bien comprendre le problème de l'alphabétisation des élèves des programmes généraux et fondamentaux, il importe de connaître le type d'élèves qui fréquentent ces programmes, le milieu familial et social d'où ils originent et les valeurs que ces milieux véhiculent face à l'école.

Ce n'est véritablement qu'en examinant cet aspect de la question qu'on réalise la complexité de la tâche et l'énormité du problème que pose à l'école la démocratisation de l'enseignement. En effet, les statistiques démontrent que les élèves qui fréquentent les programmes généraux et fondamentaux proviennent, pour la plupart, de milieux défavorisés qui n'ont pas tendance à valoriser l'école, et qui,

très souvent, considèrent l'institution scolaire comme un système commode de garderie où l'on envoie ses enfants quand il n'y a rien de plus sérieux à faire. La plupart du temps, ces milieux n'ont pas accès aux livres et considèrent la lecture et l'écriture comme une perte de temps. Les enseignants et les enseignantes y sont le plus souvent perçus, sinon comme des ennemis, du moins comme des empêcheurs de tourner en rond.

Si on ajoute à cela que les valeurs véhiculées dans ces milieux défavorisés sont habituellement diamétralement opposées à celles que propose l'école, on commence à voir l'ampleur du problème.

Enfin si l'on ajoute à ces problèmes de valeurs fondamentales, d'autres encore plus complexes, comme le manque d'affection, la faim, les abus psychologiques, physiques et sexuels, l'alcool et la drogue, on peut se demander, à juste titre, comment l'école pourra jamais assurer l'alphabétisation de ces clientèles.

Soit, ce genre de blocage ne se rencontre pas auprès de toute la clientèle des programmes généraux et fondamentaux, mais le phénomène de l'urbanisation et de l'industrialisation, les développements technologiques de toutes sortes, ont eu pour effet de faire apparaître auprès de certaines couches de la population, des problèmes sérieux et très complexes qui, de par la démocratisation de l'enseignement, se retrouvent maintenant de plus en plus fréquemment dans l'enceinte même de l'école et de la salle de classe.

Alors que les gouvernements, les employeurs, les citoyens, les médias, se font de plus en plus exigeants à l'égard du système scolaire et lui en demandent de plus en plus, le système fait face à des clientèles de plus en plus difficiles à servir.

Y existe-t-il des solutions?

II - DES AVENUES DE SOLUTIONS

Il faut bien admettre qu'il est beaucoup plus facile de définir un problème que d'y trouver des solutions. Dans le cas de celui qui nous préoccupe aujourd'hui, les solutions risquent d'être complexes, difficiles et souvent même coûteuses. Mais quand on examine la pyramide d'âge de la population canadienne, phénomène qui aura pour effet d'engendrer très bientôt de sérieuses pénuries de main-d'oeuvre qualifiée, quand on examine les problèmes sociaux très profonds qui commencent déjà à se manifester, il me paraît extrêmement important de définir le plus rapidement possible des modes d'interventions aptes à corriger au moins partiellement le problème. À mon avis, les solutions relèvent principalement de trois ordres :

1) La recherche et la formation des maîtres

2) Les structures du système scolaire et les programmes d'études
3) Les «relations extérieures» de l'école.

1) La recherche et la formation des maîtres

L'éducation est un art, mais c'est aussi une science. À ce titre, comme n'importe quelle autre science, elle doit s'appuyer sur la recherche. Il est surprenant de voir qu'au Canada, on n'accorde généralement que peu d'importance à la recherche en éducation. Sauf pour une ou deux exceptions notoires, on pense par exemple à OISE à Toronto, les universités et les gouvernements consacrent généralement peu d'argent et d'efforts à la recherche en éducation.

Ce problème est encore plus évident au Canada français. Cette absence de recherche risque en effet de nuire considérablement à notre capacité de répondre adéquatement aux problèmes qui surgissent en milieu scolaire. Il faudrait penser à la création d'unités de recherche, regroupant des chercheurs dans les domaines de la pédagogie, de la psychologie, de la neurologie, de la sociologie, etc. qui travailleraient, en étroite collaboration, à divers projets de recherche touchant l'éducation. On ne pourra se permettre encore longtemps de proposer des solutions qui relèvent davantage de l'intuition que de données scientifiques précises. À long terme, cela risque de coûter beaucoup plus cher que de financer des projets de recherche.

Le domaine de la recherche débouche directement sur la formation des maîtres. L'un et l'autre me paraissent devoir être étroitement reliés. Alors que l'on se dirige rapidement vers une pénurie sérieuse d'enseignants, il est grand temps, à mon avis, de revoir en profondeur les programmes de formation des maîtres et de s'assurer qu'on prépare davantage les futurs enseignants aux réalités nouvelles de la salle de classe et, en particulier, aux besoins des clientèles défavorisées. Ce problème peut paraître facile à régler, mais sans l'apport de la recherche, d'une part, et une volonté ferme des ministères de l'Éducation, des conseils scolaires et des universités, d'autre part, cette réforme risque d'être amorcée trop tard. Je me suis déjà suffisamment frotté à la réalité universitaire que sont les chasses gardées, les querelles inter-départementales et interfacultaire, la lenteur et la lourdeur de l'administration universitaire, pour me rendre compte de la complexité de cette tâche. Mais à mon avis, il faudra procéder dans ces domaines de manière déterminée et surtout il faudra agir vite.

2) Les structures du système scolaire et les programmes d'études

Le deuxième palier sur lequel il faudrait également intervenir se situe au niveau des structures mêmes de l'école et des contenus des régimes pédagogiques et des programmes d'études.

L'examen des structures de l'école publique révèle que ces structures tiennent compte davantage de l'efficacité administrative que pédagogique. Ainsi, par exemple, de déterminer qu'il faut douze ans à tout le monde pour atteindre la fin des études secondaires relève bien plus du domaine administratif que du rythme d'apprentissage. Cela varie même d'une province à l'autre, ce qui prouve bien qu'il s'agit d'une mesure arbitraire. C'est à l'élémentaire que ce genre de structure rigide me paraît être le plus dommageable, puisque c'est à ce niveau, du moins ce devrait être à ce niveau, que se maîtrisent les habilités de base de lecture, d'écriture et de mathématique. Aussi, d'avoir ainsi numéroté, bien clairement, le nombre d'années a eu comme conséquence de créer des pressions inutiles sur le système scolaire lui-même. Ce n'est pas pour d'autres raisons que le concept de «promotion sociale» a vu le jour et fait, encore aujourd'hui, des ravages dans les systèmes scolaires.

Il est inutile, à mon avis, de penser que les enseignants du secondaire vont réussir à montrer à un élève à lire, à écrire et à calculer s'il ne l'a pas déjà appris à l'élémentaire. L'élève n'y prendra pas non plus le goût de lire et d'écrire.

Ceci n'est qu'un exemple, parmi d'autres, qui démontre le besoin de repenser certaines structures inhérentes au système scolaire.

Au secondaire, il importe de revoir, si ce n'est déjà fait, toute la notion des programmes généraux et fondamentaux pour voir si cette structure sert bien les intérêts des élèves défavorisés et pour s'assurer que les élèves y acquièrent véritablement les notions et les connaissances qui leur seront de plus en plus nécessaires pour fonctionner en société. Il faudra, par ailleurs, faire de plus en plus de place aux nouvelles technologies auprès de ces élèves afin d'assurer les apprentissages fondamentaux. Il est temps que les enseignants cessent d'avoir peur des nouvelles technologies et qu'ils s'en fassent des alliés efficaces. Il faudra enfin revoir les contenus des programmes afin d'en assurer à la fois la rigueur et la pertinence.

Je sais que plusieurs provinces ont déjà amorcées des réformes en profondeur en ce sens, mais il importe de les amener encore plus loin et d'éviter que les administrateurs scolaires en déforment le sens et l'intention.

Il ne faudra pas négliger non plus le rôle et l'importance primordiale de la mesure et de l'évaluation comme moyen efficace de mesurer les progrès de chaque élève et de dépister le plus tôt possible les difficultés que rencontrent les élèves. Il faudra bien sûr par la suite savoir mettre en place des mesures correctives.

Au plan du soutien pédagogique, il faudra assurer aux enseignants et aux enseignantes en salle de classe, le soutien et l'encadrement psycho-pédagogique dont ils ont besoin. Ainsi, la présence de bons services de counselling et d'orientation, de psychologie, de santé et même de travail social sont devenus des outils essentiels au

succès de l'apprentissage, en particulier pour les élèves en difficulté.

Des efforts considérables devront également être déployés pour assurer le développement et surtout le rayonnement des bibliothèques scolaires. Je suis toujours désolé quand, dans une école, la bibliothèque prend l'allure d'un mausolée dédié au livre lui-même, plutôt qu'à sa diffusion auprès du plus grand nombre possible. Il faudrait également que les enseignants en salle de classe encouragent et facilitent l'accès à la lecture, et ce, tout particulièrement auprès des élèves défavorisés, ce qui ne va pas toujours de soi.

Enfin, il faudra que les structures scolaires favorisent l'intervention des enseignants et des enseignantes les plus expérimentés et les plus qualifiés auprès de ces clientèles difficiles à servir. Il faudra que ces intervenants inventent des structures et des modes souples de livraison qui assurent les transférabilités des acquis et qui rassurent les élèves sur leur pertinence.

3) Les relations extérieures de l'école

Finalement, c'est au plan des relations extérieures de l'école même qu'il faudra mettre de sérieux efforts. Alors que, dans un passé pas si lointain, les écoles opéraient dans des milieux véhiculant des valeurs rurales, et où la non-éducation des parents assuraient aux enseignants respect et vénération, c'est loin d'être le cas aujourd'hui. On a l'impression, en effet, qu'un fossé grandissant sépare aujourd'hui l'école des parents et de la communauté. Pourtant, il est primordial d'établir et de maintenir des communications et des relations ouvertes avec les familles et la communauté, de développer des activités communautaires, d'encourager les parents, même analphabètes, à participer à la vie de l'école et ce, afin qu'ils puissent redevenir le support dont les enseignants ont particulièrement besoin de nos jours. Pour ce faire, il faudra d'abord que les enseignants et les administrateurs scolaires fassent les premiers pas et acceptent de s'ouvrir au monde extérieur. Il faudra qu'ils consentent à discuter véritablement des problèmes, qu'ils acceptent, sans être sur la défensive, les critiques et s'engagent à faire les changements nécessaires quand ils s'imposent, qu'ils expliquent les approches, les méthodes d'enseignement, les contenus et leur pourquoi, etc.

Bref, il faudra du temps, des efforts et beaucoup d'ouverture d'esprit pour rebâtir les ponts qui se sont peu à peu effrités au cours des dernières années. Il faut à tout prix rétablir le contact avec la communauté. C'est la crédibilité même du système scolaire et des enseignants qui est en cause.

À elles-seules, ces mesures ne règleront pas tous les problèmes d'alphabétisation et n'empêcheront pas toutes les mortalités scolaires. Mais si de telles mesures étaient mises en place de manière coordonnée, j'ai l'impression qu'elles

pourraient aller loin dans la résolution de ce problème d'alphabétisation qu'il nous faut, comme société, absolument enrayer le plus rapidement possible.

CONCLUSION : RELEVER LE DÉFI

Voilà donc les propos que je tenais à vous livrer aujourd'hui. Vous aurez probablement constaté qu'ils ne comportent rien ni de très nouveau, ni de particulièrement révolutionnaire. Mais relever le défi de l'alphabétisation exigera lucidité, courage et vigueur. C'est un défi que l'école, seule, ne pourra relever. Il faudra pour ce faire que cette action soit le fruit d'efforts concertés de la part des enseignants et des enseignantes, des administrateurs scolaires, des gouvernements et de la société en général. Mais le défi, s'il est de taille, n'en est pas moins passionnant.

Pour ma part, je suis heureux de voir que la Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants ait jugé à propos de se pencher sur le problème de l'alphabétisation à l'école. Cela me semble être un signe de maturité pour des enseignants d'admettre que le problème existe, qu'il est sérieux et qu'il importe de s'y attaquer. Cela me paraît d'un heureux augure.

Merci.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL LITERACY NEEDS

STUDENTS OF NATIVE ORIGIN

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INTRODUCTION

The views I will express in this presentation are based on several kinds of work that I have done in the field of language and literacy in Native education. One was a study of the state of English and Native language and literacy teaching in federal and provincial schools attended by Native children in isolated communities in the far north of Ontario (Burnaby, Nichols, and Toohey, 1980). A second piece of work involved advocacy for better English and Native language education in my role as a member of TESL Canada, the national organization in support of English as a second language education (Burnaby and Elson, 1982). Perhaps the most influential undertaking for me, in terms of the topic of this presentation, was a seven year project to develop an English language arts program for native children who come to school speaking only or mainly Cree and Ojibwe (Burnaby et al, 1986/8). I also edited a collection of articles about issues related to the use and implementation of writing systems for native languages in Canada (Burnaby (ed.), 1985). Finally, I collaborated with a demographer to analyze the 1981 Census figures with respect to the numbers of aboriginal people and the languages they speak as well as characteristics of those who speak a Native language (Burnaby and Beaujot, 1986). I have noted this work here not to flaunt these efforts but to provide references for those conference participants who might be interested in following up on some of the points I make in this presentation.

APPROACH TO LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN EDUCATION FOR NATIVE CHILDREN

Throughout this presentation, my position is that Native children are children first and foremost. The implication is that they deserve and will respond well to the best teaching methods and learning opportunities we can provide for encouraging language and literacy skills in any children in and out of the school setting. I will discuss ways in which these basic methods can be focused to suit specific characteristics that Native children might have because of their social and environmental context. However, I underline that they respond like all other children to good teaching approaches and learning opportunities.

VARIABLES CONCERNING NATIVE EDUCATION

There are vast differences among Native children in terms of their physical, cultural, and linguistic environments. Thus, any generalizations I make here are very sweeping. For example, there are over sixty Native languages in Canada, grouped into eleven language families. All but three languages (Cree, Ojibwe, and Inuktitut) are considered to be at risk of extinction because of their dwindling numbers of speakers (Foster, 1982; Burnaby and Beaujot, 1986). Overall in Canada, according to the 1981 Census figures, 29.3 per cent of ethnically Native people speak a Native language as a mother tongue. Approximately 25 per cent of Native children of school age speak a native language as their mother tongue (Burnaby and Beaujot, 1986, p.33). Thus, in Native education we are concerned with English or French as a second language for only one quarter of the children. For children who come to school speaking only or mainly a Native language, the medium instruction is English or French except in the lower grades in some areas of the Northwest Territories and Arctic Quebec. See Toohey (1982) and Tschantz (1980) for historical discussions on medium of education and modern implications.

For many Native languages, writing systems have only been developed in the past few decades, but for some there has been a tradition of writing for almost two centuries. Some of these writing systems use symbols that are not at all like the Roman alphabet. The communicative functions that writing in Native languages have in their respective communities tend to be significantly different from the functions we have for English and French literacy in Canada in general (Burnaby 1985). Also, largely because elementary education for Native people only became truly universal in the 1960's, many older adults, particularly those from more remote areas, are not literate in the official languages. In addition, access to secondary education is problematic even today for students from remote communities because they must leave home and go to live in a larger community. This can be highly stressful for them and their families. My point here is that many Native children come from environments in which literacy in various languages functions differently from literacy in urban, non-Native Canada.

Also, cultural diversity among Native groups is almost as great as is linguistic diversity. Thus, making generalizations about traditional native culture is about as risky as making cultural generalizations that would include Scandinavians and Greeks. In addition, Native children come from physical environments that range from isolated northern settlements to large cities in the south. Their amount of contact with (for want of a better term) the majority society differs greatly not only because of where they live and the kinds of activities that go on in their communities but also relative to such factors as access to mass electronic media. In sum, Native children are a very diverse group and their specific needs as Native children must be assessed individually.

SOME GENERAL STRATEGIES

In the context of the position given above that good language arts for any child is good language arts for Native children and the caveat that generalizations about the unique characteristics and needs of Native children are very difficult to substantiate, I will outline some strategies concerning language and literacy in Native education that seem to have been useful in a number of Native education settings. To begin with, it is an axiom in education of any sort that beginning from the known and working to the unknown is likely to produce good results. There are several practical implications here for Native education. If teachers of Native students are not from the students' community, as is often the case, then it is essential that they make an explicit and continuing effort to get to know that community in all facets of its life. Only then can they begin to appreciate what the children bring with them to school in terms of cultural and environmental knowledge on which teaching can build. One evident aspect of moving from the known concerns having materials available for reading and discussion that reflect the children's physical environment. Published educational materials are almost all aimed at an urban audience. For Native children in small northern communities, the concept of a "park", for example, may be mystifying. Published educational materials also make powerful assumptions about cultural norms. In one northern Native community a teacher told me of the confusion caused in her grade one class over a picture story in a published text that showed a mother and daughter going to the city animal shelter to buy a dog. The idea of buying a dog and of an animal shelter was alien to the children. Thus, at the very least, teachers of Native students should learn enough about the environmental and cultural contexts of the children's lives to avoid materials that will be confusing to them. In the early grades this stipulation may mean that teachers must prepare a good deal of their material themselves, preferably in cooperation with community members.

Still on the theme of building from the known, teachers of Native students should learn as much as possible about the functions of oral language and literacy that the children have observed in their home and community lives. Children who have been read to a lot have learned a great deal about the structures of written stories and the way in which print works in books. For many Native children, oral traditional and modern stories are used to amuse and socialize young children. The structures of oral stories may be different from those of regular children's books, so the Native children's expectations of story structure may not be met when they are read to from published books. One strategy often used by teachers of Native children is to use published Native stories or transcribed Native stories from the community for reading in class. This is likely to be effective as long as the teacher checks with community people regarding their attitudes to these stories. For example, in some Native cultures it is inappropriate to tell certain stories at particular times of the year. Another strategy, for use in reading regular published books with Native children, is to take extra care in the lead-up to the reading of the story to develop the

children's expectations of the subject matter, and to check frequently during the reading on the children's impressions of the characters and actions and their expectations about what will happen next. A sure way to incorporate children's knowledge of subject matter and their understanding of story structure is to use their own stories either developed through language experience processes or through their own independent writing.

Teachers of Native children must be aware of oral and literate functions in the children's experience in other ways as well. For example, what literate functions do children see adults performing and what forms of print are available to them, and in what languages? Language experience trips by the class to stores, offices, health care centres, and so on, can be informative for the children and teacher alike, and the teacher can learn what forms of print exist in the community that can be drawn into lessons. With respect to oral language patterns, teachers should be sensitive to the ways in which people in the community use language, particularly in interactions between adults and children. Misinterpretations by teachers of children's language patterns as learned in the community may lead teachers to label children inappropriately as withdrawn, inexpressive, or rebellious when in fact the children are simply responding as they would to other comparable adults in the community.

Finally, on the theme of moving from the known, teachers of Native children should make themselves aware of the kinds of skills that Native children develop in their life in the community. Traditional or modern games may foster certain talents in children. For example, in some Native communities, complex versions of "cat's cradle" are learned and enjoyed by young children. Children who accompany adults into the bush often develop sophisticated skills and knowledge about using natural materials, outdoor survival, animal and plant life, and so on. Native children are often taught traditional crafts such as carving and beadwork. Focusing on such skills in the classroom gives the children a chance to demonstrate their competencies and to incorporate school learning into the learning they have accomplished elsewhere.

With respect to social patterns among children and between children and adults, I will mention here some strategies for organizing interactions in the classroom that seem to have been successful in a number of Native education settings. These are not to be taken to be generalizations about the social characteristics of Native children across Canada. However, I see them as good teaching approaches for any children, non-Native as well as Native. One strategy is to reduce competition among individual children and to reinforce group, cooperative activities. For example, in a lesson in which the whole class participates, choral responses can be accepted rather than waiting for individual children to volunteer an answer. The use of activity centres in the classroom, where children can work independently on their own, and small group projects, where children can cooperate on a project, can foster independence and reduce the focus on individual performance while the whole class is watching. Cooperative rather than competitive games can

be used. Children's personal achievements can still be rewarded by having their stories read to the class or having their artwork displayed without particular children being seen to stand out consistently from the others.

Native children often do well in situations involving groups of children of mixed ages. Thus, cooperation between teachers of older and younger children can result in skills development of both groups of children. For example, a grade five class can be invited to choose buddies in a grade one class and come in and read with them regularly. The grade five children will develop their confidence in their own reading skills as well as learn something about teaching, and the younger children will benefit from the reading experience. These relationships may continue outside of school hours. Certainly, outings outside of school can include classes of different ages.

Finally, it has been noted of a number of Native cultures in Canada that children tend to learn best by observation. They like to have the opportunity to see something performed a number of times. When they feel that they understand what to do, then they will attempt it themselves. Often, they have mastered the skills well through this process. They may feel uncomfortable if they are pressed into experimenting with the skill until they feel they have some control over it. Classroom applications of this would be for the teacher to model target skills as much as possible, for example, reading and writing in many contexts. Also, it is valuable to invite guests into the classroom to demonstrate skills and for the class to go out into the community to observe how community people do certain things. The impact on the children's learning may not be evident for some time, but the experience cannot help but be useful. Also, children's observations of modelled behaviour can be highlighted by having them write or draw about the experience.

SUMMARY

None of the approaches and strategies that I have mentioned here have unique application to Native education. I would advocate them all as good classroom practice for any children. Teachers of Native students are urged to pay specific attention to the physical, cultural, and linguistic environments of their students in order (1) to focus the content of their teaching on the children's experience within community norms, and (2) build on the strengths and skills of the children.

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STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL LITERACY NEEDS

LITERACY AND GENDER: MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the connections between literacy and gender, and to discover how school programs might use this knowledge in the enhancement of higher levels of literacy and in designing programs intended for students at risk.

I want to emphasize the verb 'explore', because in many cases the existing data are weak, and previous analyses of gender and literacy are lacking. This is unfortunately a familiar situation; in other papers I have discussed the meaning of this silence in mainstream educational theory on topics which touch on gender, although strong arguments can be made that gender is of direct relevance to school improvement, staff development, leadership styles and the like. The silence can be deafening; I have argued that this side-stepping of theorists amounts to an ideological bias I call gender-neutrality. Later in this paper, I will return to this phrase to argue that gender-neutrality is an expensive political indulgence given the centrality of gender in everything from learning styles to annual income.

As a starting point for this discussion, I will offer (yet another) definition of the literate person, one which seems to me well-suited to the notion of literacy as a shifting continuum rather than as a finite, measurable state. The author of this definition is unknown, but it is used by the Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation:

The Literate Person

"Literacy today is multi-faceted. The literate person develops:

- the ability to "read", to evaluate and to manage information from a variety of sources, including print, television, computers, the arts; etc.
- the ability to express information, ideas and emotions in a variety of forms;
- an understanding of how reality is constructed in every text (print and otherwise) and an understanding of the role of each reader's own reality construct on the interpretation of that "text";

- a sensitive, reflective appreciation of the legacy of our cultural heritages and a conscious awareness of the way that the socio-cultural environment shapes our understanding of what we perceive;

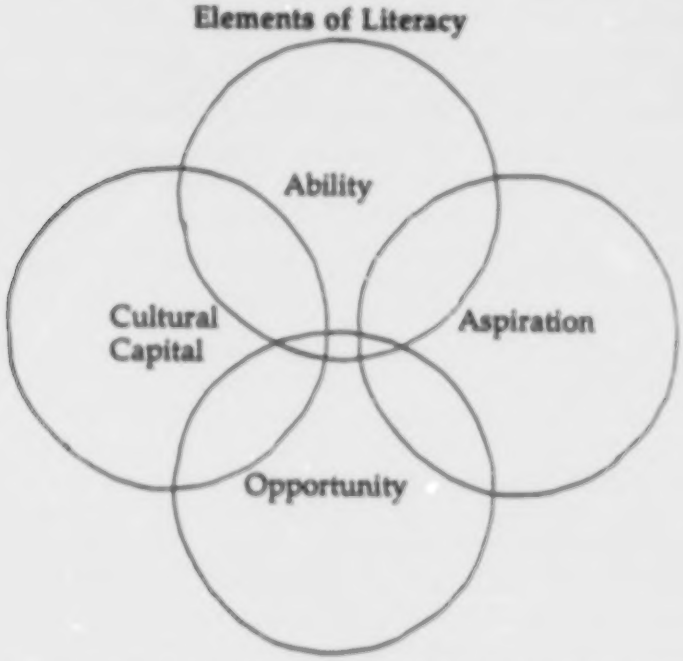
- an awareness of thinking and learning processes, both his/her own, and those of others.

The literate person is empowered by the ability to think critically and to communicate effectively, and is able to use his/her expanded understanding of the world to enhance his/her relationships.

Source unknown[1]

This definition obviously requires more of the individual than Southam's "8-out-of-10 correct" definition, but it is interesting to speculate that some who fail Southam's test could do better on this assessment.

Most definitions of literacy -- whether circumscribed or not -- focus on an 'end state' rather than on the elements necessarily present if the process of becoming literate is to take place. To emphasize the process of literacy, I want to propose a



This model is intentionally non-linear, and attempts to demonstrate the interconnectedness of these four elements. As I discuss each element, the key

question to be addressed will be "to what extent does gender influence the acquisition or use of each element?" If it can be demonstrated that gender is central to each petal, it follows that prudent gardeners will respect and respond to gender as a fundamental consideration in encouraging the flower to bloom.

(As an aside, I readily admit that the label and definition of each of these elements could be subjected to extensive debate. We could certainly spend the rest of this hour arguing what constitutes ability. I seek your indulgence in moving along.)

ABILITY

To what extent does gender influence the acquisition or use of ability?

Although there are many documented differences between males and females in specific sub-categories of ability, there is little evidence that there are distinct differences between the sexes in the general distribution of intelligence. Women appear to have been more affected by the impact of gender on achievement than its impact on ability, although a considerable amount of zealous research into biologically- determined explanations, for example, of women's lower success rate in the sciences, persists. To admit to biological differences between male and female brains is not, to me, problematic from a feminist perspective, unless we assume that every observable difference between males and females requires the remediation of girls. This is to fall into a "deficit model" which holds the male standard to be the ideal. Neither is achievement necessarily an objective construct; it can be argued that achievement as a concept only derives meaning from the culture, and that this culture is predisposed to value achievement more if it is gained in a sphere associated with the male. (We have no method of awarding a 78 for achievement in human relations, but we have few qualms in claiming it represents achievement in physics. It is not entirely clear that one figure actually carries more meaning than the other.)

Having suggested that both ability and achievement are probably tainted by a male-centred view of the world, they are nonetheless constructs which are assumed to be gender-neutral, not shaped to the advantage of one group or another. Some would similarly assume schooling to be gender-neutral, but a very compelling argument can be made that schooling is a 'gendered' experience. Sadker and Sadker argue that the process of schooling is actively harmful to young girls who come to school far ahead of their brothers in verbal, social and physical skills.[3] The typical Jennifer is ready for formal reading and computation activities when she enters kindergarten, but her program will be far more suited to the developmental pattern of little Scott in its emphasis on socialization and rudimentary verbal skills. Jennifer learns, and is rewarded for passivity and helpfulness. Jennifer's ability may well be judged by her willingness to conform; one study determined that teacher-predictions

of IQ scores of girls in kindergarten were correlated not to ability but to degrees of compliance.[3] The predictions of boys' scores were not influenced by this variable. In the typical primary classroom, girls wait while the boys -- or most of them -- catch up.

And indeed, most of them do catch up by late high school when school has lost its feminine aura and is more strongly associated with the masculine business of competing for university spaces and the world of work. By the end of grade twelve, boys are outperforming girls on standardized examinations, although girls continue to hold their own on teacher evaluations.[4] (As we move towards a greater dependency on standardized evaluation, we should be aware that this will disadvantage young women.) Glen Harvey, using American data, suggests this is not the only trend influencing gender and achievement. "During this period of educational reform", he writes, "when there has been evidence of an achievement decline, the scores of females have declined more than those of males, and where there has been a gain, males have generally exhibited greater gains than females."[5]

There are, of course, many young women in our schools who score very well on all kinds of achievement tests, although we all know young women for whom the threat of appearing too competitive and too capable is enough to erode their performance. Many girls would rather be thought attractive than smart, and we have not eradicated the stereotype that requires women to choose between appearing capable or loveable. Even exceptionally able girls encounter a filter when it comes to having their talents recognized, as girls continue to be under-identified in programs for the gifted.[6] This may be a kind of preparation for life; we are losing a considerable pool of human talent when we allow -- or encourage -- the very best to become disaffected. Psychologists Denny and Arnold are in year seven of a ten-year follow-up of male and female high school valedictorians. They found that two thirds of female ex-valedictorians had begun to lower their career aspirations by their second year of university, and although they actually out-performed their male counterparts at college few had gone on to doctoral degrees. In the work world, male former valedictorians had jobs with more pay and more prestige.[7] Nevitte notes that there is a greater likelihood of top Canadian undergraduate women students defecting from the study of maths and sciences than is true for average achievers.[8] It seems to be the very best who are the most discouraged.

It appears that achievement anxiety continues to control young women long after young men have transferred their anxiety to fear of failure. Half of what appears in the pop psychology section of any bookstore would disappear unless able women did not recognize themselves in promos about feeling like an imposter, having it all but having nothing, and the price of success. It would seem that attribution theory might explain part of this phenomenon. Male students appear to attribute academic success to their innate talents, but to attribute failure to external forces including bad luck. For girls, the pattern is reversed, with success being attributed to luck and failure

to personal inadequacy.[9] One can readily see that more confidence flows to those who see themselves as the authors of their own success than to those who feel that so far, they've just been lucky. This differential in confidence is augmented by a gender-mediated optimism. When asked to predict how well they will do on a particular exam, boys will consistently overestimate their eventual grade, while girls will underestimate their results. Adding to the confusion is the perception that if a girl does well on a particular task, the task must not have been too difficult. Put another way, we have an adolescent high-achieving female who (even if she believes she has rejected it) is aware of the cultural rule that femininity and ability are dichotomous. She studies for a test, privately believing that she will not do well. When her exam is returned with a high mark, she attributes her success to luck, and then concludes that the test couldn't have been very hard after all. This is not the profile of the student who proceeds confidently along the path to enriched literacy.

It would be wrong to conclude that gender is not equally influential in students for whom giftedness is the least of their problems. There is consistent evidence that males are at greater risk of illiteracy, of being identified as young offenders and of presenting both learning disabilities and behavioural problems. I will deal with the problems of identification and remediation of learning disabilities under the topic of opportunity, but here I would note that our unwillingness to recognize gender differences in ability and achievement has seriously disadvantaged young boys. It is possible that our unwillingness to formally recognize developmental lag in boys compared to girls costs little boys dearly. CTF's analysis of the Southam data on non-literate young adults found that 62% were male, and that 47% had either been diagnosed as having a learning disability or were in a special class for those with learning problems.[10] In a study reported in OERC, late-born males (October, November, December) were found to be quite dramatically over-represented in those identified as learning disabled. Month of birth showed no similar effect in girls.[11] A very reasonable argument can be made that boys should start school six months later than girls, and that all programs should assume sex differences to be present.

OPPORTUNITY

The second element of literacy in the model I proposed was opportunity. Of course, opportunities to become literate are not limited to the classroom, but schools are nonetheless the key formal structure intended to ensure that children experience something resembling equal opportunity to achieve literacy.

To avail oneself of this opportunity one must obviously be present, and so 'dropping out' is an important subset of this topic. In order for opportunity to be realized, content and instruction must also be adapted to learners whose abilities or learning styles make it difficult or impossible for them to learn what is easily grasped by others. Who receives attention as a disabled learner, and under what

circumstances, are also relevant considerations. The shaping of curriculum, philosophy, instructional style or other factor in favour of one group or the other also becomes an opportunity issue. Again, the question to be answered is whether gender influences the acquisition or use of 'opportunity' as we have defined it.

Few of us would be surprised to be presented with the argument that schools skew opportunity towards those who represent the dominant culture, or to be told that a multitude of non-conscious teacher behaviours together with culturally-biased curriculum and materials cumulatively tend to exclude minority-culture students from the profits of schooling. When we think of minority children who have succeeded despite this discouragement, we can see that success has required the child to adapt to the norms of the school, not the other way around. Schools reinforce and reflect the dominant culture, which in the case of North American society is a culture in which gender and status are strongly linked.

There is an increasingly compelling body of thought and research with respect to schooling and gender. Dr. Carol Gilligan of Harvard is among the best known scholars to have pointed out that we have erred in generalizing from the moral reasoning systems of males to the value systems of females.[12] Mary Field Belenky and her colleagues in the book Women's Ways of Knowing, conclude from their research that our assumptions about teaching and learning are male-centred, and that women's learning processes, as well as what women believe to be worth learning, differ from the processes and priorities of males.[13] Belenky's female subjects return to the themes of concern, connection and caring when they talk about learning. These three C's pose no imminent risk to the three 'R's, which represent the schools' focus on preparing students for the world as it is experienced by men.

Judith Martin strongly summarizes this school of thought when she says "Schooling has ignored the private sphere. Learning for family life and for the reproductive processes of the society have been relegated to the family. As a result, the ideal of the educated person has been based in the male stereotype -- objective, analytic, rational, interested in ideas and things, but not nurturing, empathic, intuitive or supportive. Education has emphasized the development and application of reason and objective judgement; it has separated the mind from the body, thought from action and reason from emotion.[14]

If the gender implications of educational philosophy are a bit hard to grasp at first, consider more concrete evidence. The OERC reports that in 1989, Light and her colleagues reviewed 66 texts (each published since 1980) all of which appeared on the recommended list for history and contemporary studies (Ontario). They found that not one text met the provincial sex equity policy established 15 years earlier. The books, on average, were found to refer to girls or women -- however fleetingly -- on only 13% of the pages.[15] This study is merely the most recent to confirm that work begun two decades ago -- the reduction of gender-bias in texts, readers and other

materials -- has not substantively changed the centrality of males in the materials of the curriculum.

Bias is not limited to materials; it appears to permeate all measured aspects of instruction. For example, if we consider teacher time to be the most valuable commodity in the classroom, we must deal with a tide of data that shows that male students receive far more than their share. In comparison with girls, boys are asked more higher order questions, boys are allowed more time to respond to teacher questions, boys are asked questions more often, boys are asked to express their opinions (rather than to just provide correct answers), boys are more often told that they have ability, and boys are praised for divergent rather than convergent thinking. These results are not affected by sex of the teacher.[16]

Scholars in this field contend that, rather like minority students who succeed, successful girls often feel themselves to be foreigners, imposters, and alienated from their own accomplishments. Girls who 'make it' nonetheless describe feeling like outsiders. Indeed it is hardly surprising that some girls feel this way; what is more surprising are the large numbers of young women who succeed despite their reduced opportunity.

It is usually about now that someone points out that there must be something wrong with this analysis; how can schools bias opportunity in favour of boys when, for example, there are so many more boys in remedial programs than girls, and so many more are diagnosed as learning disabled ... for that matter, so many more males than females are illiterate?

These are important questions to be explored, in the context of opportunity. Let us consider the meaning of the high incidence of boys being designated as learning disabled. Glen Harvey argues that far from providing evidence of male disadvantage, the fact that 3 times as many boys are labelled is proof of how much additional attention they receive.[17] In his American research, Harvey found that when a female student is referred for special services, she is on average two years older than the typical male who is newly identified, and she is much further behind in her work. Hasset and Guerin studied 210 learning disabled boys and girls and found their disabilities to be clinically similar, but that in terms of their school performance:

- 56% of the girls, but only 39% of the boys, were below grade level; and
- 53% of the boys, but only 33% of the girls were receiving 'special education' services.[18]

The Ontario Child Health Study found that almost twice as many males as females had been referred to school-based special education services, and that there is strong evidence of a significant under-identification of females with school performance problems.[19] The report suggests that the kinds of behaviour disorders

associated with the male learning disabled (e.g. conduct disorder, hyperactivity) receive greater attention than the behaviours associated with learning problems in females (e.g. depression, anxiety and withdrawal). There appears to be considerable confusion about the diagnosis of learning disabilities in females. In one study of a group of diagnosed learning disabled college women, only one quarter actually exhibited the verbal-performance differential associated with the learning disabled, but most continued to exhibit anxiety and withdrawal.[20] It would appear that we are diagnosing the wrong young women for the wrong thing, but it is not only diagnosis which calls equal opportunity into question. There is no evidence that learning disabled instruction is any less gender-biased than other instruction, and, for example, Fellers and Saudargas found that in comparison with learning disabled boys, girls identified as learning disabled spend less time doing schoolwork and spend less time receiving the attention of their teachers.[21] In summary, it is not at all clear that identifying fewer girls as presenting learning problems, or even fewer girls actually displaying learning problems, presents a defense against the criticism of male-focussed schools.

Finally, within this category of opportunity, we should consider 'dropping out'. In light of how much attention this topic receives, the lack of gender-specific data about dropping out is quite amazing. Consider, for example, this table which presents Southam's data for the young adult population:

Characteristics of Canadian-Born Literates and Illiterates Aged 18-24[22]

Dimension	Specific Characteristics	Total	Illiterates	Literates
Reasons for stopping schooling (based on total without high school certificate or equivalency certificate	Financial reasons	5%	-%	7%
	Work/Got Job/Wanted to work	19	11	21
	Pregnant	4	13	1
	Boredom/lack of interest/ didn't like subjects/ didn't see value in staying	11	10	11
	Didn't like school	7	7	7
	Didn't do well in school	8	8	8
	Disagreement with teacher(s)/kicked out/ didn't like educational system	6	13*	4
	Wanted to be on my own	4	-	5
	To help family/had to work	3	-	4
	Illness	4	5	4
	Personal reasons (unspecified)	1	1	1
	Peer pressure/social pressure/ everybody left school then	1	-	1
	Still in school	22	34	19
	Don't know/not stated	14	16	14
	*13% of Canadian-born illiterates left school before graduation because of disagreements with teachers or system, compared with 4% of literates.			

A casual reading of the data would suggest that only 13% of illiterates left school because of pregnancy. But wait a minute ... not many boys quit school because they are pregnant ... and only 38% of the sample of illiterates is female. By my calculations, that suggests at least 33% of female illiterates left school because of pregnancy ... and that is three times as high as any other stated reason. Now compare literates to illiterates. The strongest percentage difference between literates and non-literates for school leaving is pregnancy. Surely any serious attempt to address dropping out and literacy would see this data as extremely useful, and reports would be full of recommendations designed to address this problem. I went looking for these recommendations, and found a silence that is hard to account for without imputing ideological purposes. Even the extensive American "High School and Beyond" study only comments that "early family formation" has serious negative consequences[23] ... a typically gender-neutral way to refer to teenage pregnancy. The Newfoundland report on leaving early, prepared by the Memorial University of Newfoundland[24], presents only one gender-differentiated statistic ... that of reasons for dropping out. The study reports that sixty per cent of the females listed "personal reasons" as compared with 36% of males, to explain why they dropped out. This difference is not discussed within the more than 120 pages of text, nor do the authors speculate on what might constitute "personal reasons". Yet, appended to the report are transcripts alleged to be randomly selected from the sample. Five young women's words are captured; four of them explain that they dropped out because they were pregnant. None of the report's recommendations makes any reference to pregnancy. The OSSTF report, "Reducing the Dropout Rate"[25] makes no reference to pregnancy in the text or discussion of recommendations, "pregnancy counselling" is identified in a subset to a recommendation as one of six 'related' issues that should be addressed (and this is within the context of 32 main recommendations).

The message here is quite clear. We have good reason to believe that teenage pregnancy results in girls quitting school and that their attainment of literacy is curtailed as a result. If we could make an impact in reducing pregnancy, we would make an impact on literacy, poverty, and a whole host of socioeconomic problems. Think about what your school, board or system has done about AIDS in the last couple of years ... weathered the controversy? Trained teachers to provide instruction about sexually transmitted diseases? Installed condom machines on school premises? Invited a theatre troup or shown a film on AIDS? Put up posters? Good for you. Now, what have you done about teenage pregnancy? Where were your condom machines when only girls' futures were on the line? Why not use the same kind of massive public relations to reduce teenage pregnancy? What does our tolerance for teenage pregnancy say about gender and status?

The dropout data are incomplete and suffer from lack of analysis. What else lies hidden in data that are so stubbornly gender-neutral? Surely, the more we know about who is at risk and why, the better our response can be to prevention.

ASPIRATION

The third element in my literacy model is aspiration, arguably among the most important factors determining who will become literate, and to what degree that literacy will be taken. Of course, few learners set out with an expressed desire "to become literate", for aspiration is more likely to be phrased in a determination to stay in school, expressed in the amount of effort a student will expend to master a skill, or inferred from students' career plans. The question before us is thus whether gender influences goals (short-term, life or career) and whether gender makes a difference to a person's sense of efficacy in achieving these goals, or in the actions taken to achieve these goals.

A positive answer to these questions seems quite obvious. Although aspiration and a sense of personal power are strongly associated with socioeconomic level, they are even more strongly associated with gender. Research continues to confirm that gender, rather than socioeconomic status, is the key predictive variable in the career plans of elementary age children. In addition, the lower the socioeconomic level, the more traditional will be the career goals of children. In the previous discussion of ability, it was noted that girls feel less personally responsible for their high grades than do boys, and tend to feel that others are more responsible for what happens to them than they are themselves. This lowered sense of personal control -- of efficacy -- is an important sex-differentiated variable.

The most common explanations for these gender-related effects rest in some manipulation of socialization theory ... that the training of home, school and society predispose sex and class-predictable choices. Yet anyone who works with real students as well as theories knows that aspirations and choices are also mediated by individuals who do exert some degree of free agency. Expectation and coercion are not equivalent forces; indeed in her study of business-education girls in Vancouver, Jane Gaskell reports that each of these young women believed her choice of a secretarial school program had been made freely, and represented what any reasonable person would do under the circumstances.[26] Gaskell thus frames aspiration in the context of reality and circumstance:

> *"Young people take into account not just what they would ideally like, but what they see as possible and feasible. These adolescent girls felt that in order to have a family at all they would have to do the domestic work and plan their work lives around this. Men would not do the domestic work, alternative forms of child care were not available or good for their children, and as women they would earn less money than men and be likely to be hired in nontraditional areas. It was these perceptions of constraining social structures, rather than internalized preferences, that explained their continuing adherence to traditional paths."*[27]

Whether reality's impact on aspirations can be changed until reality changes is an important question at hand. We can point out a discouraged young woman, the consequences of leaving school without sufficient training, or the likelihood of poverty if she should assume the role of a single parent, but we will be unable to contradict her if she points out that even with skills she will earn only 63 cents to the average dollar earned by a man, and that as a single parent she will be six times more likely than a male single parent to live in poverty. We can tell her that her future lies in non-traditional work, and that she would enjoy training in trades. If, however, on the way home from school she passes a construction site, she is likely to have second thoughts about the version of reality we have been presenting. What hopes you have for yourself and your future are shaped by many factors, but perhaps none is stronger than the sense one has about whether that future is attainable.

CULTURAL CAPITAL

The final element in the model I began by proposing is 'cultural capital', a term which has been used by a number of authors to explain the interaction of variables associated with socioeconomic status and school success. In CTF's 1989 report "Children, Schools and Poverty"[28], the work of Stephen Richer, (1988) on this topic is considered in depth.[29] Richer defines cultural capital as what the middle class brings to school: a set of values that accepts competition among peers, the primacy of work over play, an emphasis on materialism, and the submission of self. This capital is transformed into academic success through mastery first of the hidden, and then of the formal curriculum. It is clear that lower-class students have less cultural capital in both subtle and substantive ways. Such students tend to be less motivated to achieve, more likely to stress the present over the future, more impressed by concrete than symbolic rewards, and more inclined to appreciate the physical over the verbal.[30]

Cultural capital is not, of course, divorced from the effects of monetary capital. In Canada, one in five children lives below the poverty level, and thus at least 20 per cent of our students are at risk for exhibiting one or more of the school-related problems associated with poverty. These problems include poor school performance, behaviour problems, hyperactivity, aggression, low self-esteem, less preparedness for school, little preschool stimulation, delayed cognitive development and lower overall achievement. Disadvantaged children score, on average, ten to fifteen points lower on IQ tests. When you're poor, you come to school with less of almost everything except problems.

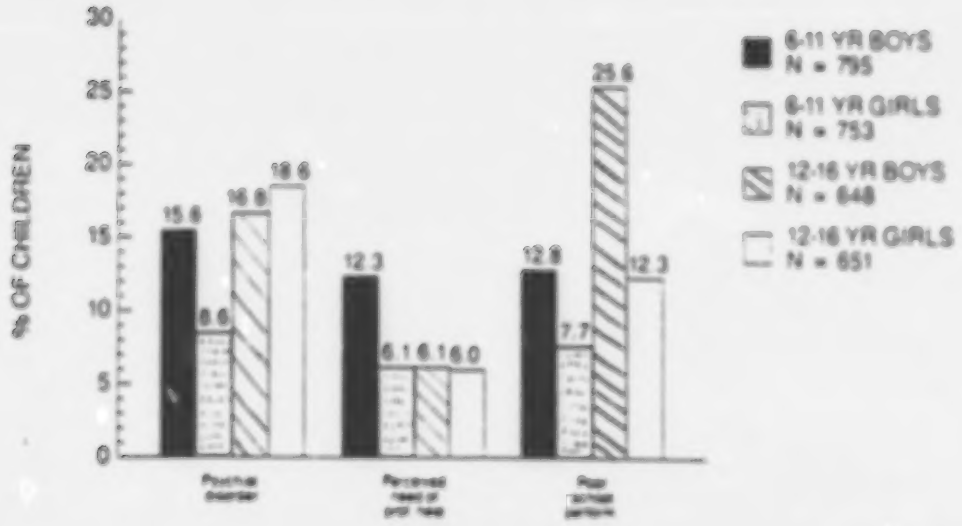
A student's lack of cultural capital appears to influence teacher behaviour as well. Research suggests that teachers appear to offer more attention, more praise and greater rewards to middle-class students, while lower-class children receive more teacher punishment and criticism. Teachers appear to be more likely to offer middle-class students supportive and co-operative contact, while using a more autocratic and

controlling style with poorer children. (It should be noted here that the variable of behaviour is not factored out of this research ... the child who is constantly acting outside the norms of the middle-class classroom will undoubtedly receive more criticism.) Cultural capital thus affects not only how you act, but how others react to you.

Now, to our question. Does gender influence the use or acquisition of cultural capital? Research does not definitively answer this question. Indeed, I was unable to find research which had asked this question. Nonetheless, there are some suggestions that gender influences how a child responds to having less cultural capital. In the already-cited Ontario Child Health Study,[21] researchers were looking for indicators of risk for psychiatric disorder, perceived need of professional help for emotional or behavioral problems and poor school performance. The risk indicators were, in order of frequency, having one parent, being on social assistance, living in subsidized housing, and being on welfare. Another and somewhat more political way of looking at these indicators, is to conclude that the first ... being a single parent ... sets up a very high probability of poverty, and that all the other indicators (being on welfare, living in subsidized housing, etc.) simply follow from being poor. As we go on to discuss 'at risk' students, I believe it is important to remember that there are poor children only because there are poor parents, and, to be blunt, usually because there is a poor woman leading the family unit.

Consider the following chart from the OCHS report:

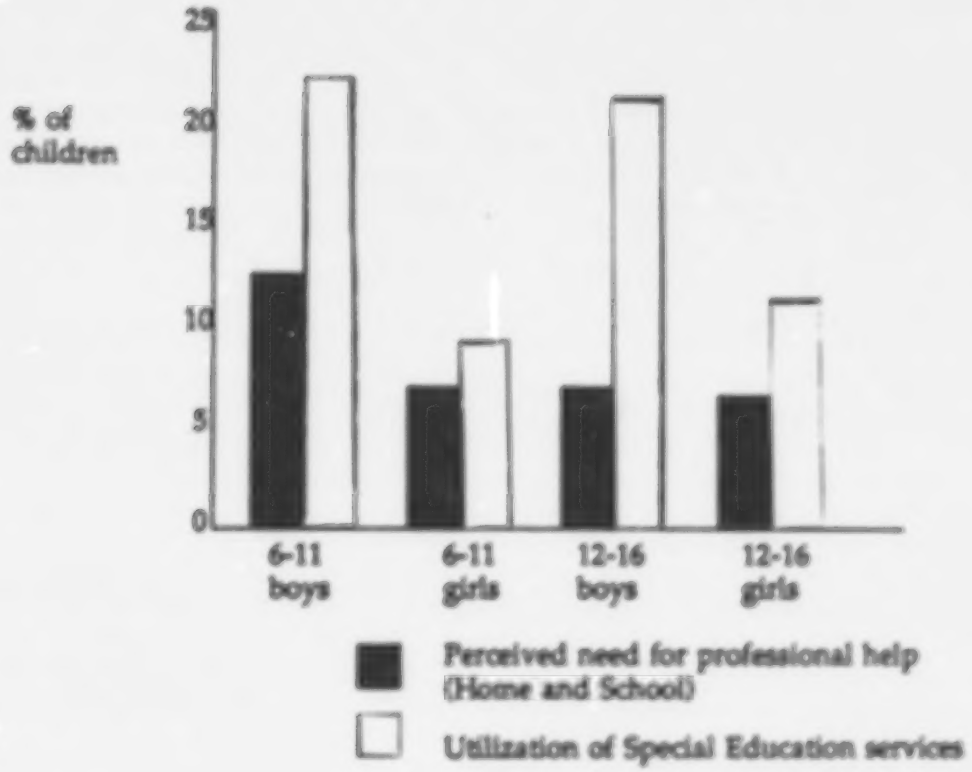
PREVALENCE OF OUTCOMES BY SEX AND AGE[22]



Here we see psychiatric disorder, by incidence, by age and sex, followed by perceived need of help and poor school performance. Boys between the ages of 6 and 11 are perceived as needing professional help more than any other category, although actual incidence for this group rates third in actually having a disorder, and rates second in showing poor school performance. In comparison, adolescent girls show the highest rate of psychiatric disorder, almost the same level of poor school performance as younger males, but have the lowest rate of identification for professional help.

When we put the figure for utilization of special education services alongside perceived need for help we again see some inequalities around use of resources:

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES



Here, boys at both age groups are identified more often as being in need of help, and they are also found to receive help in percentages considerably higher than their identification. Girls' identification rate is lower than the youngest boys', but equivalent to adolescent males, although girls' utilization of services is about half that of the young boys.

The study also concerned itself with identifying the kind of psychiatric disorder likely to be exhibited, and found that 12 to 16 year old females are seven times more likely to have an internalized disorder than an externalized disorder, and are four times more likely to have an internalizing disorder than 12 to 16 year old males. Nonetheless, parents were found to be more than twice as likely to be aware of neurosis (one of the internalized disorders) in their sons as in their daughters.

What does this have to do with cultural capital? The data would seem to suggest that disadvantaged males (to the extent that misconduct is voluntary), despite higher problem identification and remediation rates, appear to reject the "system", rebel against it and the school, and in so doing forfeit, to a large extent, what the school has to offer. Disadvantaged girls would appear to be somewhat invisible, and to reject themselves as being able to deal with the system, rather than the system itself, and therefore drop out or in other ways marginalize themselves from the middle-class values of the school. This pattern would seem to be consistent with other gender-associated characteristics already discussed including attribution of success and failure and locus of control. The destination reached by these two paths of alienation from school may look the same ... for example, both boys and girls drop out, but the prevention measures would be quite different if the overall strategy were to make school better fit the student, or if the overall strategy were to strengthen the students' sense of efficacy and personal worth. If we persist, however, in describing the problems as gender-neutral, we will be prevented from appropriately designing effective solutions that respond to, rather than mask, gender differences.

The OCHS study identifies some additional gender-specific differences worthy of note.

- 'Somatization' (i.e. hypochondria) is 2 to 3 times more prevalent in 12-16 year old females, and may well result in higher absenteeism which is strongly correlated with dropping out.

- Hyperactivity is three times as common in boys as girls, and it is also more common among the poor. Since hyperactivity can be treated as a medical condition, its persistence suggests either a 'boys will be boys', laissez-faire approach to parenting or it is symptomatic of the lower levels of medical attention received by the poor, or both.

- The school and home are unlikely to both identify disorders in many at-risk children. In the study, there were 0 cases of home and school identification of hyperactivity in young girls, which probably results in excluding any possibility of girls being treated for this disorder.

- One-parent families were found to be a strong indicator of poor school performance by girls, but not significant for boys. What would explain this difference?

- Being on social assistance (welfare) was found to increase the likelihood of poor school performance in girls, but not in boys. What would explain this difference?

Before leaving this brief examination of cultural capital, I want to return to an earlier statement about the causes of child poverty, which I attributed primarily to the poverty of single mothers. Like most social problems, poverty is not gender-neutral. According to the Canadian Council for Children and Youth, the risk of poverty for a child in a single-parent family headed by a woman is five times greater than that of a child in a single-parent family headed by a man or living in a two-parent family.[33] Degree of poverty must also be taken into account, with the average poor single mother of a preschooler, in Ontario, living at only 54.7% of the poverty line.[34] This is not lacking life's comforts, this is abject poverty. Our lack of resolution in dealing with the growing numbers of women and children in poverty makes a mockery of all the other more attractive interventions we create to improve literacy.

This paper does not claim to have identified all the gender-related topics within the scope of these four elements, nor to have arrived at the only interpretations possible of the data available to us. There are major questions outstanding, and chief among them is how best to intervene in the engenderation of sex roles that multiplies the at-risk factors of deprivation. It is precisely those children with the least cultural capital who are the most predisposed to see rigid separations between male and female as not only inevitable but desirable. Buying into sex role stereotypes becomes, in itself, an at-risk behaviour. There is abundant evidence that adolescents who over-identify with the category 'masculine' or 'feminine' are at high risk of exhibiting mental and physical health characteristics that are dangerous to their well-being, from drug use to higher pregnancy rates to suicide to becoming physically abusive or experiencing abuse. The most common emotional symptom for highly sex-typed adolescents is depression, for few young adults can compare themselves favourably to either Rambo or Barbie. We set up a chain of failure and disillusionment if we do not recognize, and then challenge, the profound vulnerability of young people who believe narrow sex roles will set them on the path to success and happiness.

To challenge the limits of sex roles, we have to become much more willing to see education and schooling as gendered experiences, that is to say, profoundly, if sometimes invisibly, shaped by gender. We are far from this agreement, and the solutions will remain unattainable unless the problem is correctly identified.

With a broader recognition of the centrality of gender in schooling will come additional research, and certainly a number of the effects this paper has identified, (but by no means explained) must be more thoroughly understood if they are to be effectively addressed. Research into learning disabilities, for example, needs a more explicit gender focus as well as a social and political context for its agenda. We need to know more about the role of attribution theory in achievement. We need to know more about the interaction between gender and learning styles, and we need to know more precisely how to respond to these differences. We need to take the initiative in figuring out how we can simultaneously show respect for the cultures of minority and immigrant students, and yet deal with culturally-embedded and highly restrictive views of sex roles held by many of these groups. I believe we are unlikely to be able

to deal with any of these questions until we have accepted and acknowledged the centrality of gender in our own lives, in our interactions with others, and in the dimensions of the filter through which we see the rest of the world.

On some topics, however, we already have enough information to proceed, and there can be little argument that gender is the issue at hand. We need to wage a campaign against teenage pregnancy with the same sense of urgency that we invoke when we are talking about drugs, the environment or AIDS. Schools and their leaders have been willing to weather the political fallout from dealing with these, and other, controversial topics. We can, if we want to, do the same for pregnancy. It is time that we stopped seeing this problem as belonging to the personal realm, and began to talk about consequences. If we can convince boys they should use condoms to protect themselves from disease, perhaps we can do the same to protect young women from pregnancy. We have not, as a society, taught or expected men to be responsible for their sexuality. If we did, we would have safer streets, safer hallways and safer back seats.

Finally, I think we have a good handle on how to intervene in the lives of at-risk children, most of whom are the children of poverty. Attached to this paper are a series of policies and recommendations CTF developed last year which speak to levels of responsibility, early intervention, in-school programs and teacher-training. As a society or a profession we do not lack a set of strategies, but unfortunately we appear to lack the humanity and thus the political will to put an end to the misery of poverty for one million Canadian children.

I began by presenting this expanded definition of the literate person, and I would like to close by returning to the fourth part of that definition.

> *"(the literate person develops) a sensitive, reflective appreciation of the legacy of our cultural heritages, and a conscious awareness of the way that the sociocultural environment shapes our understanding of what we perceive;"*

I hope this paper has added to your conscious awareness of the impact of gender on literacy, and has shed some light on how gender, as part of our sociocultural environment, shapes our understanding of the world.

Thank you.

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PUBLIC POLICIES FOR SUPPORTIVE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

Terrance M. Hunsley
The Canadian Council on Social Development

The evolution of a healthy society is a function of people caring, not only for their own best interests, but for others. In a society which is both sane and humane, children are treasured, for they represent the future. If they are allowed to grow and develop in a healthy and loving environment, they will create their future, and our society will thrive. But when we fail to ensure a nurturing environment, we weaken the fabric of our future society. And the costs of our failure will be carried forward over generations, just as surely as the interest on our national debt.

B.F. Skinner, in his book, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, makes an interesting point about evolution and the environment. He says:

> "Before the nineteenth century, the environment was thought of as simply a passive setting in which different kinds of organisms were born, reproduced themselves, and died .... The trouble was that the environment acts in an inconspicuous way: it does not push or pull, it selects. For thousands of years in the history of human thought the process of natural selection went unseen in spite of its extraordinary importance...."

I have been asked to talk about the role that the state can play in securing the best possible environment for children's development and learning. The state, of course, cannot legislate good or successful parenting. And although it may set standards, it really cannot determine what shall be the final product of education. However, the actions of the state are not neutral, they can and do have direct implications for educational access, the quality of the experience, and the eventual outcome.

Public education systems were developed in large part to provide equal, universal access to education and thereby, life opportunity. Therefore many of the questions around public policy are concerned with the treatment and experience of children who, for social, economic, or other reason, such as disability, do not appear to achieve substantial equality through the school system.

Other questions have to do with the kinds of public policies which have a more general application, and affect the overall relationship between the home and the school. I will come to these questions later on; but first I want to talk about poverty, equality, and the school system.

The Canadian Teachers' Federation report, "*Children, Schools, and Poverty*", documents in a simple and powerful way, the impoverishment of children in Canadian society; the consequence of disadvantage in the public school system; the fallout of our failure as families, as educators, as a society, to adequately respond to the needs of our children.

I commend the CTF for this report. I wish I had written it. (However, I did do the next best thing; I hired the researcher who worked on it.)

Some of my commentary today is drawn from this report, while some comes from the research of the Canadian Council on Social Development.

I am sure we could have a long discussion about the meaning of poverty. We could point out that poverty in Canada is not the same as poverty in the third or fourth world countries. We could point out that people may be impoverished spiritually, as well as economically. We could mention that some people may have low formal incomes, but still through other measures maintain an adequate standard of living. We could clarify that poverty is by no means always a permanent state, that some people are always able to beat the odds, and rise in the socio-economic system.

But people would not beat the odds if there were not odds. And so there are a significant number of people in Canada who have access to such a meagre level of resources that they are placed at a significant economic and social disadvantage in society. And if we think of education as being the primary force, or investment, to promote equal opportunity in life, then we will have to conclude that for the children of poor families, for the most part, it fails.

POVERTY IN CANADA

Lets look first at the incidence of poverty in Canada; a few of the recent trends, and their consequences for children.

ESTIMATED POVERTY LINES FOR 1990

(In 1990 dollars, estimated using data for 1988 and inflation rates of 5.4 percent from 1988 to 1989 and 5.0 percent from 1989 to 1990.)

Family Size	CCSD	STATISTICS CANADA			
		A	B	C	D
1 person	12,800	14,200	12,500	12,200	11,100
2 persons	21,300	19,300	17,000	16,600	15,100
3 persons	25,600	24,500	21,500	21,100	19,200
4 persons	29,800	28,200	24,800	24,200	22,100
5 persons	34,100	30,900	27,100	26,500	24,100
6 persons	38,300	33,500	29,400	28,700	26,200
7 persons	42,600	36,000	31,600	30,900	28,200

CCSD lines are estimates for all of Canada. Statistics Canada lines vary with community size:

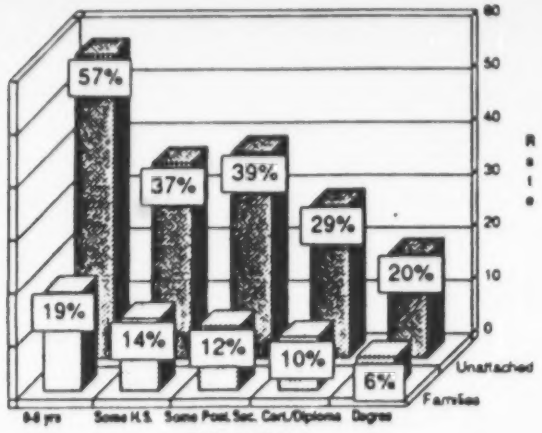
A: Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton, Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver.

B: St. Johns, Halifax, Saint John, Chicoutimi-Jonquiere, Sherbrooke, Trois Rivieres, Sudbury, Oshawa, St. Catherines-Niagara, Kitchener, London, Windsor, Thunder Bay, Regina, Saskatoon, Victoria.

C: Communities with populations from 30,000 to 99,999.

D: Communities with populations less than 30,000.

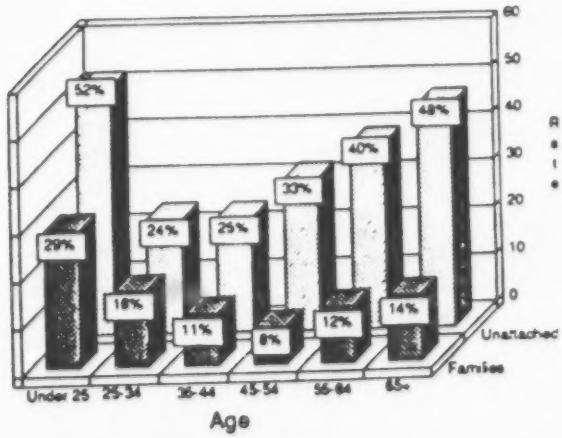
Figure 3-1
Incidence of Poverty Among Canadian Families and
Unattached Individuals, 1987, by Education of Head



Source: Statistics Canada, *Income Distributions by Size in Canada, 1987*

Source: Statistics Canada, Income Distribution by Size in Canada, 1987

Figure 3-2
Incidence of Poverty Among Canadian Families and
Unattached Individuals, 1987, by Age of Head



Source: See Figure 3-1

The most commonly-used poverty measures in Canada are the figures calculated by Statistics Canada as "Low Income Cut Offs". These figures vary by family size, and by the size of the community of residence. As a very rough rule of thumb, you could think that these incomes would provide for a basic standard of living, a "no-frills" budget. They are slightly less than half of what the average Canadian family in that situation would have as an income.

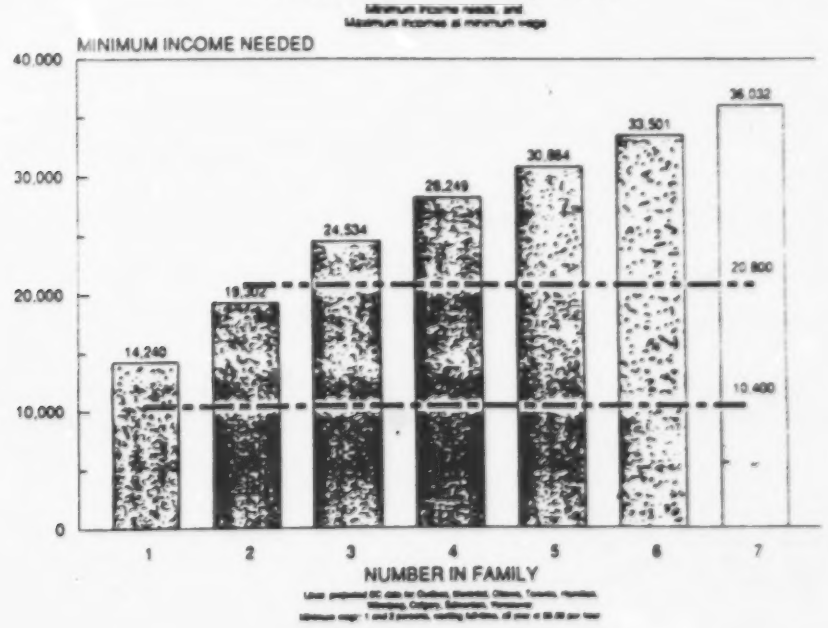
About fourteen percent of Canadians are poor (about 11% of families, and the rest are unattached individuals, who have a much higher rate ... over 35%). The 11% national rate reflects a variance from a low of 10% in Ontario to a high of 20% in Newfoundland.

The rate has been slowly easing downward since the early sixties, although it jumped dramatically during the early eighties, and has just recently regained pre-recessionary levels. However, the general stability in poverty rates, masks some significant changes within the poor population.

The poorest group in society used to be the elderly. But gradual improvements ir the Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement, as well as the implementation and maturation of the Canada/Quebec Pension Plans, have significantly improved their standard of living. By small increments, we developed a guaranteed annual income for the elderly. Single seniors still have a high rate of poverty, but they are not much below the poverty line.

Not so for young families, though. A number of developments over the past fifteen years have combined to weaken their economic position in society:

POVERTY LINES, 1990



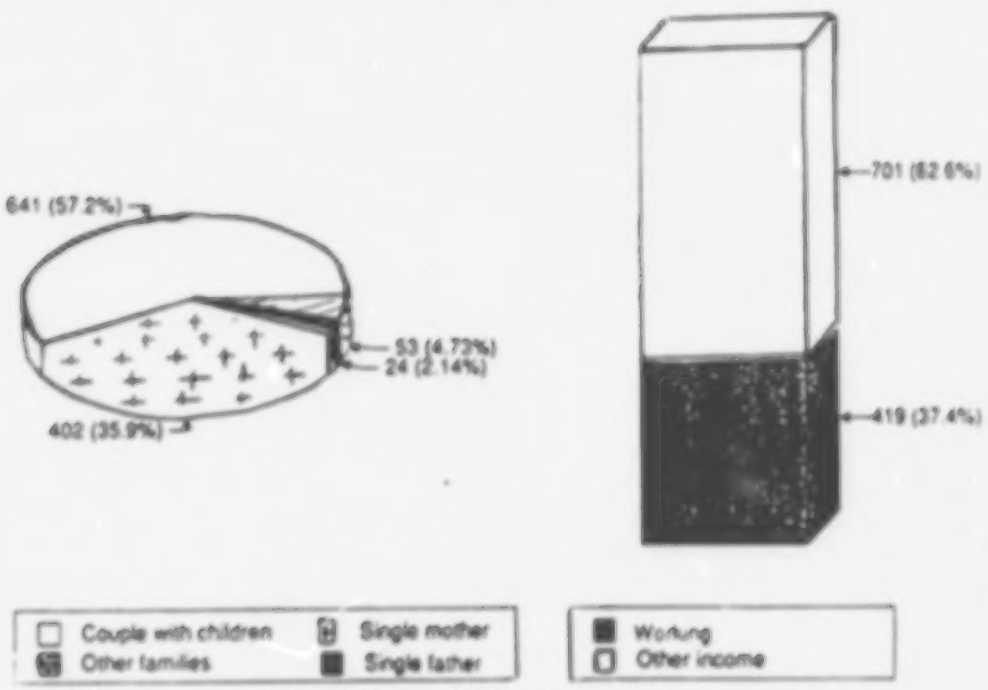
- Beginning in about 1975, provincial governments stopped adjusting minimum wage levels to keep up with inflation. As a consequence, they have now lost almost half of their purchasing power. In the early seventies, about two-thirds of Canadian families had only one earner. If this were a minimum wage worker supporting a spouse and child, for example, that person would have to work for 48 hours per week to achieve a poverty line income. Today, two-thirds of families have two workers, and part of the reason is economic: both workers in this same family of three, if they were relying on the minimum wage, would have to work 46 hours per week to achieve a poverty line income. And even this does not take account of the extra costs of having both parents in the labour force.

- From the mid seventies to the mid eighties, average wages lost about four percent of their purchasing power. But this does not tell the real story. Many people did quite well during that time period. But a recession caused in part by high interest rates, pushed young people to the margins of the economy. Young people suffered high unemployment rates. Young families saw their purchasing power drop by about 19%.

Poverty among children soared...over a million at mid-decade and just now settling down below 900,000. But remember, the total number of children is dropping too. We still have about one in six children living in poverty...the largest group of the poor.

CHILDREN IN POVERTY, 1986

Number of children (thousands), their family structures and major source of income



Working: one or more with 49 or more weeks in year
CCSD Fact Book on Poverty, 1989. Statistics Canada Lines

And we should also recognize that in an economy which requires two earners for a family to survive, single-parent families are at a tremendous disadvantage. At last count, two-thirds of female lone-parent families in Canada were poor. Is this simply a fact of life? Will the poor be always with us? Well perhaps, but only if we choose to make it so. By way of comparison, Sweden, which has chosen to have full employment, and better income support, even if it does mean higher taxes, has a poverty rate among this same family group of 10% ... one-sixth the Canadian level. Of the western industrialized world, Canada is second only to the U.S. in its poverty rates among children.

But what about social assistance rates? Well, perhaps it won't surprise you that provincial governments like to keep their basic social assistance rates well below the minimum wage rate, so that there will be an incentive to work. Allowances for children will bring families up above the minimum wage rate, because families can simply not exist on the wages of a single earner at the minimum wage. On the whole, however, social assistance did not keep up with inflation. In fact, many families are living on incomes that are not much more than half of the Statistics Canada low income measures.

The numbers of people dependent on welfare increased in the eighties, but did not go down appreciably. Almost two million people rely on social assistance including 250,000 mother led families.

WHAT HAPPENS TO POOR CHILDREN?

To be poor in Canada means that society is stacked against you. Simply put, you come out behind on almost every measure:

- the infant mortality rate is about twice as high among poor children as among rich children;
- low birth-weight babies are twice as common;
- physical and mental illnesses and disabilities are more common;
- abuse, suicide, drug and alcohol addiction are more common; as are other forms of anti-social behaviour patterns.

Because of compulsory school-leaving laws, virtually all children aged 6 to 14 are in school. And as the CTF report says; "Educational attainment is a very reliable

predictor of upward social mobility, employment stability, and higher income." (p.7) So how do poor children do in school? A variety of research reports, including the Radwanski report in Ontario, show that:

- poor children are more likely to be streamed into basic or lower end educational channels;
- they are more likely to drop out;
- they will have lower achievement levels, behaviour problems, and lower self-esteem.

The evidence in clear. Poor children may have an equal chance to get into the schools, but they are not served well by the school system. If middle class and richer children did as poorly in the public school system as poor children, the system would have been scrapped long ago. Society would simply not have accepted it.

IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

How do we resolve this situation? Obviously we cannot and should not lay the blame entirely on the school system. That is not my message at all. But we can start in the school system, and then work our way into other areas. Here, I want you to know that I am not pretending to be an expert on the education system. However, I cannot help but notice that there have been a number of special projects, working with children at various ages, but especially with the younger ones, which have shown that good programming, and special resources that also engage the families, can help disadvantaged children to get a lot more out of the school system.

We have had enough projects to know, essentially, that extra resources will be necessary, and that educational policies will clearly have to place a continuing high priority on assisting low-income families and their children, if real progress is to be made.

Why have these policies not been developed? Why are these special projects still special projects? For as long as they are considered special projects, then by definition, the system as a whole is not being reoriented and supplemented to attain the objective of equality in educational outcomes, which is truly a prerequisite of longterm socio-economic improvements.

Can the educational system ever accomplish this objective by itself? Can the school be an effective agent of social change? I would like to think so, but I'm afraid that would be dreaming in technicolour. The school system will always serve the dominant class interests in society. But we definitely could do better, if we felt it was

an objective worth pursuing. We could see that school boards have the resources, and that teachers have the incentives, to work toward greater equality of educational outcomes.

OTHER POLICY MEASURES:

But the school system would have its work made much easier if it did not have to swim against the stream of social and economic currents. Dramatic changes are required in other policy areas. Otherwise, as many project evaluations have shown, progress will tend to be undermined by the family, peer, and economic environment of the poorer children. (Not entirely, by the way. There is evidence that long term benefits often accrue, even in situations where academic performance falls back after project intervention ceases. For example, the headstart projects in the U.S. were considered for some time to have had no lasting impact on children because the benefits were offset by the continuing economic deprivation of the children. However, even in these early programs (which were later refined, even if offered on a more limited scale) later evaluations showed that children, on reaching their teens, were having lower rates of conflict with the law.)

Low income families live under conditions of constant social discrimination and economic stress. The environment, to use Skinner's terminology, will continue to be selective. But this is not a natural and inevitable process. We could change the situation if we wished to. My organization, the Canadian Council on Social Development, has put forward on several occasions, clear proposals for policies which would go a long way toward eliminating poverty and disadvantage in Canada. Let me sketch a few of these out for you:

a) Recognizing that over half of all poor families have a member in the labour force, and half of those work full-time, year round, we have made the less-than-radical suggestion that fulltime employment should allow an individual to live at the poverty line for an individual, even if it can't allow for supporting a family. We have about a million adults working at or near the minimum wage. This wage should be raised to a minimum of $6.50 per hour. Not a princely salary, but a definite improvement. And there is no reason that government should allow low end workers, who do not have access to collective bargaining, to suffer greater reductions in living standards than the average worker. The cost to the taxpayer is negligible, and employers would only be restoring a better floor for wages, in service industries which, for the most part, are not competing in international markets.

Let me give you an illustration of how governments have been subsidizing low-paying employers over the past fifteen years. We did a calculation of how much it would cost, in theory, to raise the incomes of all poor families to the

poverty line. This amount, which we call the "poverty gap", was $8 billion in 1986. In 1973, measuring in 1986 dollars, the poverty gap was $6 billion. So it had increased by $2 billion over that period. However, we then made the same measurement, but took out of the calculations in both years, the amount that poor people were already getting from governments. So without government assistance, the poverty gap would have been $14 billion in 1973 (using 1986 dollars as a measure). But by 1986, the poverty gap before government assistance was calculated, was $26 billion, almost double the amount of 1973! So more and more government money is going to fill the hole left by smaller wages. Hardly free enterprise at its best. That is why we want the minimum wage increased, and then indexed to the movement in average wages.

b) A second major reform is needed, and that is in the area of public support for low income families with children. We have suggested, (as has Ontario's Social Assistance Review Committee), that the various programs for children's benefits ... including the family allowance, the child tax credit, the credit for dependent children, and the portion of provincial social assistance payments for the support of children, be combined and increased, to form a major new family tax credit.

This would be available to all low income families, regardless of whether they are in the labour force or on welfare. At the maximum value, it would be set at about $4,200 per year, although paid out monthly, like the family allowance. ($4,200, in 1990 dollars, is the amount that the all-party parliamentary committee set in 1985, as the minimum amount of money to raise a child in Canada.) The credit would be reduced by $.25 for every dollar that the parent received above the minimum wage level, until it reached the level of $250 per year, after which it would remain universal.

These measures would effectively take children out of the welfare system. It would move many working poor families up close to the poverty line. It would remove the disincentive for families to move out of welfare into the labour force. It would be simple to administer, and would remove much of the stigma of welfare. It would mean that a million children would be healthier, better fed, and more able to succeed in school.

Beyond this, there is a definite need for more affordable housing, which can be met through supply-side intervention ... building more houses through cooperative and non-profit housing organizations. In cities where rents exceed the financial capacity of families, rental supplements would still be required.

These measures would improve the economic position of the poor, which would provide the opportunity for dramatically reducing the incidence of

disadvantage. Combined with ongoing special efforts to work with low income children and their parents, substantial gains could be made.

PARENTAL SUPPORT POLICIES

But what can we do in a more general sense to support successful parenting? We know that many families that are supposedly "middle-income", are also under economic stress. The problems of family management in two-earner families, the lack of time for family activities, the lack of role models for such families, all make the parenting job more difficult.

We know that many children arrive at school hungry, and in fact have little useful nourishment throughout the day. And of course, not all of these children are poor. Should the school take on the parental duty of feeding children? I think the answer here is clearly, yes. Good nourishment is essential to the learning process. Collecting food could be a task for the food banks which have spread throughout the country to respond to the desperation of hungry people. With the reforms mentioned earlier, and with decent social assistance rates for the adults who still require support, we could rid ourselves of the national disgrace of people begging for food. The goodwill and commitment of the people involved could be turned to collecting food for the schools. (I know that this is not entirely a new suggestion, and that several food banks are doing this now.)

We know that several aspects of inadequate parenting affect children's progress in school. Not only inadequate nourishment, but abusive treatment, neglect, lack of time or capacity to be involved in the child's learning; all influence the educational outcomes.

Are there policies and programs of general application which can support the parenting role? There are several, of course, but I would like to highlight a few that I think are important:

a) PARENTAL PUBLIC EDUCATION:
It seems to me that we have public education programs for almost all dimensions of our lives ... many of them aimed at children. We spend a great deal of money telling people not to smoke, not to drink and drive, not to use drugs, to buckle our seatbelts, and to engage in safe sex. These used to be primarily areas of parental responsibility.

We are beginning, tentatively, to tell people not to abuse their children or their spouses. A few televised messages now tell parents that their children need play time with them. I think we are coming to two new conclusions about parenting:

> First, as society becomes more complex, the task of parenting becomes more difficult; and
>
> Second, there is nothing magical about the process of conception and child bearing that makes one a good parent. Instinctual behaviour is not good enough in present-day environments. Moreover, we are not prepared as a society to accept certain norms that once may have been prevalent ... a man's home is not his castle, and his wife and children are not his personal property.

I believe we should be putting much more investment into parental public education. We should let people know about the importance of good nutrition. We should provide some guidelines for parents. Public education investments that result in healthier and better educated children will pay for themselves many times over in reduced social damage in the future.

b) BETTER GUIDANCE RESOURCES:

A few years ago, I did some work for the Nova Scotia Senior Citizens Commission, on the subject of retirement policies. I asked the group to think back through their lives, to try and identify what single experience, if improved, would have most contributed to the betterment of their life, including their retirement. It was a surprise to everyone in the group, that almost all of them focussed on the need for better guidance services in the schools. The impact, or potential impact, of these services, is substantial and longlasting. Individualized guidance, involving both the student and the parents, should begin early, and be carried through systematically. Yet I have the impression that many guidance instructors are in fact doing social work; responding to the most pressing social problems.

I have no doubt that we need to have social workers in the school system. And of course, in many cases, we do. But we have rather a silly situation existing in the federal-provincial cost-sharing regulations. Specifically, provinces cannot claim cost-sharing through the Canada Assistance Plan for social workers in the schools unless those social workers are employees of the social services department. This provides an impediment to appropriate school social services, and results, to some extent, in guidance resources not being able to fulfill their real mandate.

LABOUR FORCE POLICIES:

Many of the policies which affect the time or ability for parents to be with their children, or to be involved in the school system, are bundled up in laws which regulate our labour force behaviour. In fact, a great part of our lives, and the changes therein, are determined by the ever-changing boundaries between what we do informally in the home, and what we do in the formalized work world.

a) CHILD CARE

We know that the ordinary family needs two incomes today, if they wish to maintain the standard of material living of their parents' generation. In fact, much of our economic growth has been pushed by the baby boom, and by the increasing participation of women in the formal economy. We are clearly aware of the stress that is placed on parents, when appropriate and affordable child care arrangements are not available. Yet we have not introduced a good child care program in Canada. We have left many families with insecure child care arrangements. We have witnessed the development of a generation of arrangements. We have witnessed the development of a generation of "latch-key children". Our government has pretended that it is saving taxpayers money by not introducing decent child care, when in fact, the costs are just being submerged in other programs, or absorbed by unfortunate families and children. Even employers are starting to realize that increased absenteeism, sickness, and stress related problems are prices that they pay. A major investment in child care would improve the functioning of families, children, and the economy. It would also create more jobs which produce a socially useful product.

b) WORKTIME REGULATION

Our work times and school times are not mutually reenforcing. I can think of no good reason for this. I believe it is important that parents be home when the children get there. One way to do this is to reduce the work week, or to allow for greater flexibility of working hours. This should be possible for Canadians in general work more hours per year than several of the other western countries (with of course the exception of the U.S.). Countries like West Germany have reduced their worktime substantially, while still achieving much higher levels of worker productivity than we have.

Canadians also work far two much overtime ... obviously in part because of economic stress. However, when as many people work over fifty hours per week as are unemployed, I think something is out of balance.

On the other hand, I see nothing sacred in the present schedule of school hours and weeks. We could surely revisit our schedules to better coordinate with parents' responsibilities.

c) PARENTAL LEAVE:

A number of countries, particularly in Northern Europe, have over the last few years, introduced policies which allow parents a great deal more flexibility and choice in making decisions about work and fulfilling parental responsibilities. Among such policies are:

- Extended leave provisions for childbirth and infant care. Usually at least one year with pay is available; in some cases two or three with at least partial reimbursement; often protection of job and social security entitlements for longer periods.

- Larger family allowance payments, so that with two or three children, support would be as much as employment at the minimum wage.

- Child care options ... so that parents may have a right to child care at little or no cost, or may choose to stay at home and receive the equivalent of child care as a direct income transfer.

- Rights to parental leave to care for a sick child ... up to several weeks per year in some countries.

These represent a combination of measures, from which Canada could choose the most appropriate. The bottom line, though, is that these countries are recognizing both the necessity, and the costs, of providing better options for parental duties. They are building these costs into their economy, so that they can be shared on an equitable basis by the society. That may in turn mean more pressure to control wages, and a higher level of taxation than ours. However, one cannot help but get the impression that these people are generally happy with their society.

FINANCING NEW AND EXISTING POLICIES:

Often, when I make a presentation on the kinds of new policies that Canada needs, I hear little murmurings, like ... "pie in the sky" ... "international competitiveness" ... "increase the deficit" ... "can we afford it?" ... etc. So I would like to finish my presentation with a discussion on social costs and expenditures.

My first point is that it really is true that there is no such thing as a free lunch. By that I mean that we do not get rid of social costs merely by refusing to respond to needs. If we do not provide for a good educational environment, the costs to society will accrue through other means ... lost productivity, more costs for justice and corrections, more health care and unemployment costs, etc. In some cases, we can divert some costs from the formal system, but they will still be borne by the

society, often falling on those who can least afford them.

Let me give you an example, using the medicare program to illustrate: We pay for almost all of our health care costs through the public medicare system. It takes about ten percent of our GNP. The U.S. chooses not to pay as much for public health care, leaving it to the private system to respond. As a result, large segments of the population do not have health insurance. If they get seriously ill, their life savings can be lost ... or they incur a longterm debt load. For others the costs are paid by employers' and employees' contributions. In total, about 12% of the GNP is taken up for health care, not counting the poor health suffered by those who cannot afford to seek treatment. Does it make the U.S. more competitive? Well, according to John Crispo of the University of Toronto, Canadians have a $700 advantage in the cost of a new car produced in Canada, because of our medicare program ... Let's hope that this advantage survives the longterm effects of free trade. Anyway, the point is that social costs don't disappear just because we refuse to provide for their payment.

Following is a chart of the main policy recommendations I have made:

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1) School Resources For Working With Disadvantaged Children
2) Improved Minimum Wages
3) Improved Family Credit
4) Affordable Housing Assistance
5) Improved Social Assistance Programs
6) Parental Public Education
7) Improved Guidance Resources
8) Cost-Sharing for Social Workers in Schools
9) New Child Care Resources
10) Flexible Worktime Policies
11) Improved Parental Leave Provisions.

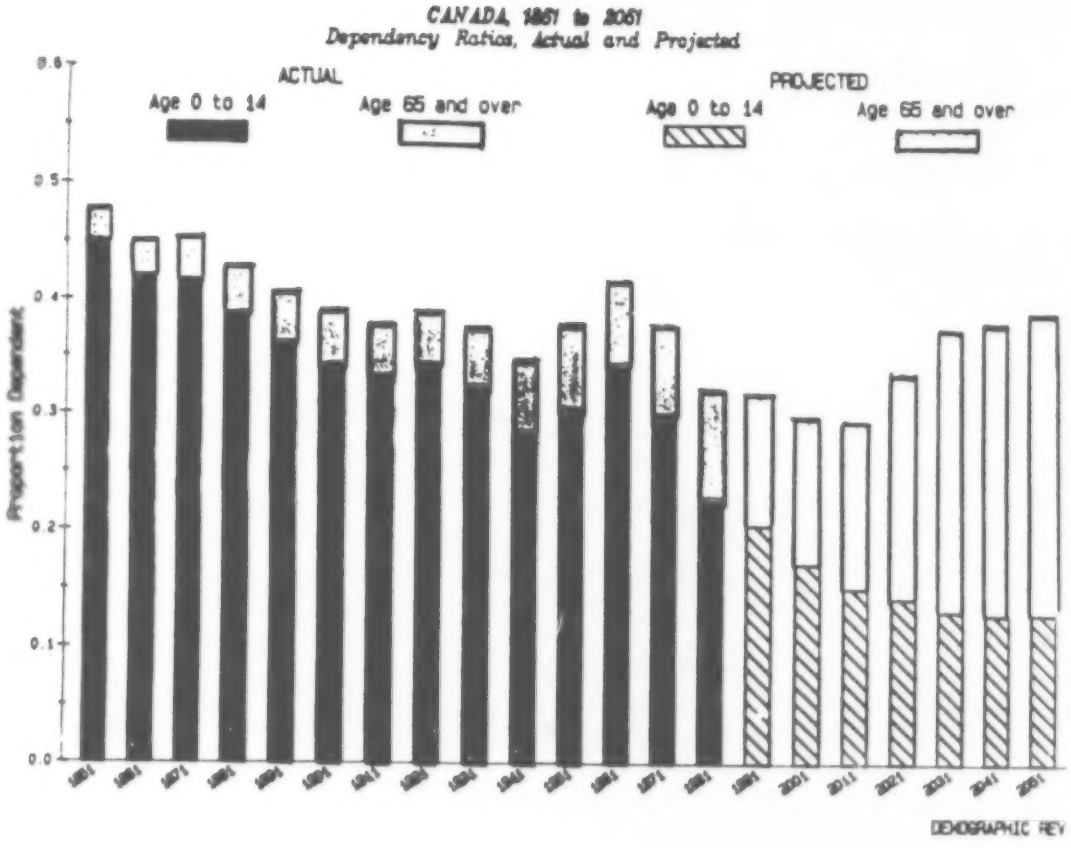
These recommendations imply greater public expenditures ... perhaps as much as $15 billion per year. A good part of these expenditures would be offset by lower payments for social assistance and unemployment insurance. They would also generate greater economic growth. In total, there is no reason to assume that social expenditures, as a percentage of our economy, would increase.

I want to expand this point a bit, because I have met a number of people who seem to feel that social spending is not only out of control now, but will go through the roof as our society ages. Neither of these statements is true, but they have been used to disguise more ideological reasons for reducing social protection in Canada.

LET'S LOOK AT SOME FACTS

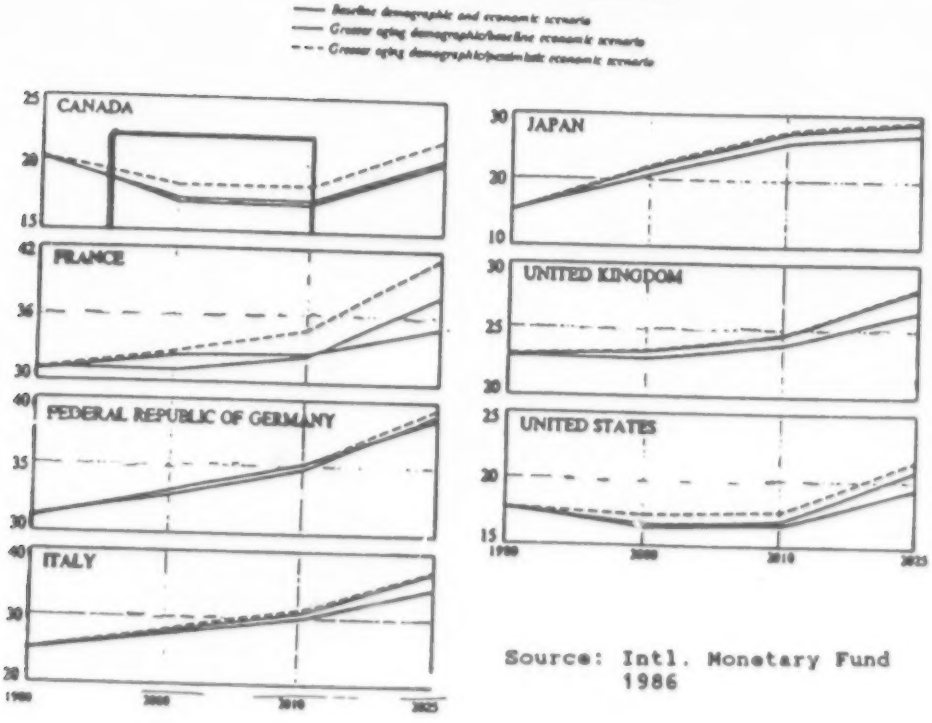
- Canada's social spending is in the lower range of OECD countries. Even the U.S., if we account for the difference in health care, spends more on social programs than Canada ...(granted they include military pensions as a social program)

- Although our population is aging, our dependent population as a whole is not growing relative to the labour force. In fact, as this illustration by Health and Welfare Canada shows, the dependency ratio in Canada will actually decline for several more years, regaining recent levels again only in about thirty to forty years.



- Contrary to most other industrialized countries, our social costs relative to our economy are going down, and will continue to do so through the end of the century. The International Monetary Fund, (hardly a leftist-activist group) has projected the trend quite clearly, with information verified by the Government of Canada. Canada's huge baby boom, combined with the rapid increase in female labour force participation, means that our total labour force has expanded very quickly, relative to our total population. Economic growth should continue, because the labour force is entering its most productive years. These projections of decreasing spending relative to the economy are made, based on assumptions that Canada would maintain universality in its programs, index them all to inflation, and continue to invest in medical technology. Obviously costs for children's benefits will fall with the decreasing number of children, as would costs of unemployment.

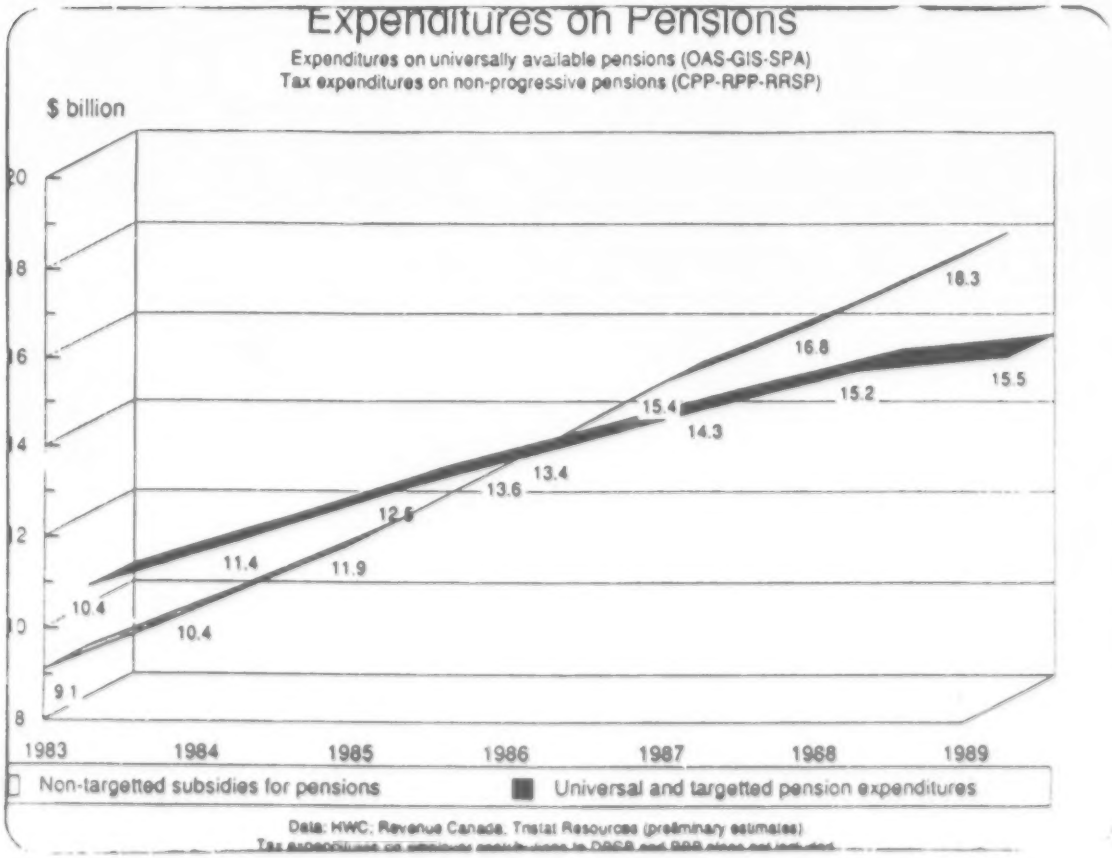
Chart 1. Ratio of Expenditure to GDP for Total Government Social Expenditure, 1980–2025
(In percent)



Source: Intl. Monetary Fund 1986

My conclusion, then, is that we have about a twenty year period where the government can exercise some choice in social spending decisions. You see where I would put my emphasis.

Unfortunately, without a lot of public pressure, that will not happen. The government is making choices to improve the income security of certain groups of the population, but not the ones I have talked about. Let me show you one of the fastest-growing areas of present and future social expenditures.



The government is concerned about the eventual cost of public pensions. So they have been investing more and more public subsidies, through tax expenditures, in encouraging people to save for their retirement. Unfortunately, only certain people can take full advantage of these subsidies, which apply to pensions for higher income workers, RRSPs for high-income self-employed, and Deferred Profit Sharing Plans for high-income executives.

Now the OECD has recently pointed out that industrialized countries will soon be witnessing the development of a new affluent class. These are people who are reaching their fifties, have two professional earners, have paid off their mortgage, are no longer supporting their children, and are inheriting property from their parents. We know them as DINKS - Double Income No Kids. Because of our baby boom, Canada will have a very large group of such people. They will be affluent and politically powerful. Some such people may even be in this room. But this is the group that the government intends to subsidize more heavily in the future. If so, it will be at the expense of young families, their children, the education system, the working poor, and single parent families.

I think that the suggestions I have put forward are a better investment for Canada. But it will take a lot of public support to convince the government of this. Perhaps the CTF could give some attention to this.

QUELLES SONT LES INTERVENTIONS LES PLUS EFFICACES QUE PEUT FAIRE L'ÉCOLE?

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Comment l'école peut-elle intervenir efficacement pour améliorer la qualité de l'éducation qu'elle offre à ses élèves? Je regrouperai mes commentaires en deux parties. Le premier groupe d'observations s'inspire d'études et de travaux sur l'efficacité de l'école, la responsabilisation des établissements, la formation fondamentale et le perfectionnement des maîtres; le deuxième groupe vient de la réflexion que mène actuellement l'Association des institutions d'enseignement secondaire du Québec sur les stratégies d'enseignement de l'école et sur les mesures d'appui pédagogique que les institutions de l'AIES utilisent actuellement pour améliorer les apprentissages de leurs élèves.

I - L'EFFICACITÉ DE L'ÉCOLE

1. Quand l'école est efficace

L'efficacité pédagogique passe d'abord par les conditions générales de l'efficacité de l'école. La recherche documentaire permet de ramener ces conditions aux cinq suivantes : une mission claire, des pratiques pédagogiques exigeantes, un climat institutionnel motivant, une saine gestion, un fort leadership de la direction.

Pour que l'école soit efficace, elle doit avoir **une mission claire**, c'est-à-dire que l'école doit avoir déterminé ses priorités, identifié ses objectifs institutionnels et s'être assurée que ceux-ci sont partagés par le personnel et par les parents. Ces objectifs s'incarnent dans le plan de développement de l'école, dans ses politiques, dans ses règlements et procédures, bref dans son projet éducatif.

Il doit y avoir dans toute école une tradition spécifique d'éducation, une culture : quelle sorte d'élèves veut-on former? quelles valeurs entend-on privilégier? Si l'on veut que les intervenants travaillent efficacement auprès des élèves, ils doivent avoir ce qu'Ernest Boyer, le président de la Fondation Carnegie, nomme "a clear vision", une vision nette de la mission de l'école.

L'efficacité de l'école tient en deuxième lieu à des **pratiques pédagogiques exigeantes**. La recherche confirme que la qualité des pratiques pédagogiques tient particulièrement aux attentes de haut niveau que l'école a à l'endroit de ses élèves. Les expériences du New Jersey, de la Pennesilvanie et de la Californie démontrent qu'en haussant ses exigences, l'école peut obtenir une amélioration des performances scolaires de l'ordre de 25 à 30 %.

Il y a consensus chez les chercheurs et les observateurs de l'école pour reconnaître que les écoles efficaces se donnent un environnement, un encadrement de qualité. Ce climat tient à l'organisation de l'école, à l'information et à la communication, à l'implication du personnel et des parents. L'école est efficace lorsqu'il existe chez les intervenants un sens d'appartenance. Nous pensons ici, en particulier, à la série de recherches menées par Carolyn Anderson et publiées dans *Review of Educational Research*. La psychologie industrielle a fait la preuve que le climat de l'entreprise influence le rendement; de même, l'école est efficace lorsque la structure d'organisation de l'école favorise la convivialité.

Quand les chercheurs examinent les écoles, ils constatent qu'elles ont beaucoup en commun : des programmes d'études, des enseignants en formation et expérience comparables, une commune structure d'organisation. Pourtant, certaines écoles sont plus efficaces que d'autres. Pour les chercheurs, cette efficacité tient avant tout au climat de l'école : à la culture de l'institution, à l'esprit du personnel, au fonctionnement de l'organisation, aux relations interpersonnelles. Pour Coleman et Jenks, la différence de rendement scolaire tient, d'une part, à l'origine socio-économique de l'élève, mais d'autre part, au climat de l'institution qui permet de mieux développer chez les élèves la personnalité et le leadership.

L'école efficace est celle dont l'organisation, le fonctionnement et la gestion sont bien rodés. Les politiques, les règlements et les procédures sont clairs et connus du personnel. Les ressources sont gérées en fonction des objectifs prioritaires de l'école.

Enfin, les recherches sur l'école efficace insistent sur le rôle du directeur d'école et plus précisément sur son leadership. Là où l'école est efficace, le directeur est un leader pédagogique, qui crée un climat favorable aux études et à la vie scolaire, qui motive la communauté. Le directeur est conscient de son rôle. Il anime son école par sa vitalité, sa compétence, son jugement, son ouverture, son courage et sa souplesse. Il jouit d'une autorité morale et il fait confiance à ses collaborateurs, particulièrement à ses enseignants.

2. La responsabilisation de l'école

Les technocrates construisent l'école à partir d'une conception abstraite. Or, il n'existe pas d'école idéale dans le ciel de Platon. À suivre cette voie, l'on ne saurait qu'aboutir à des écoles de plus en plus semblables les unes aux autres dans la médiocrité. Si l'on veut une école efficace, l'on doit tendre à responsabiliser davantage l'école. Les États-Unis sont entrés dans cette voie de la décentralisation. De tradition fort opposée, la France elle-même tend actuellement à responsabiliser ses établissements scolaires. Malgré leur longue tradition anglo-saxonne d'autonomie de leurs écoles, les états anglo-saxons sont actuellement tentés par la standardisation et la centralisation. Cette centralisation ne peut que conduire à la médiocrité, une médiocrité que l'on dénonce de façon générale en Occident et que l'on tente de corriger en responsabilisant davantage les écoles.

Pour avoir effectué des recherches et accompagné nombre d'écoles dans l'élaboration de leur projet éducatif et de leurs politiques institutionnelles, il m'apparaît que la difficulté principale tient à l'absence de pratiques institutionnelles d'auto-analyse et d'évaluation. Tels des larrons en foire, les enseignants et les administrateurs ont boudé l'auto-évaluation de l'école. L'efficacité de l'école tient à la conscience qu'ont les intervenants des forces et des faiblesses de leurs pratiques. L'efficacité de l'école est profondément liée à la qualité de leurs pratiques d'évaluation, soit l'évaluation des apprentissages, des programmes, des services et du personnel. C'est dans ce sens que travaille notamment l'OCDE en promouvant l'auto-analyse des établissements.

3. La formation fondamentale

Au cours des années 80, le CADRE a produit un dossier sur le concept et la pratique de la formation fondamentale. Il a fait le point sur les recherches menées sur le sujet aux États-Unis, en France, en Angleterre, dans l'ensemble du Canada, et particulièrement au Québec. D'un commun accord, les recherches révèlent que l'école primaire et secondaire ne réussit pas à assurer des apprentissages fondamentaux, à développer les compétences et habiletés de base. Si l'école réussit à transmettre davantage qu'autrefois l'information, l'élève atteint mal les objectifs fondamentaux de formation : littéracie, numéracie, méthodes efficaces de travail, rigueur intellectuelle, pensée autonome, structurée et cohérente. Dans l'ensemble des pays d'Occident, cette préoccupation d'une formation de base, d'une formation fondamentale est la préoccupation majeure. On la retrouve, par exemple, dans la douzaine d'études sur l'école secondaire américaine, dans le "core curriculum" qu'élabore actuellement l'école anglaise, dans la déclaration d'objectifs de formation du Collège Board américain.

Il semble que le régime pédagogique, les programmes et nos pratiques ne

parviennent pas à développer chez les élèves la maîtrise de la langue, l'acquisition de la culture générale, l'assimilation personnelle du savoir, l'acquisition de méthodes de travail intellectuel et le développement de l'autonomie intellectuelle. Nous n'arrivons pas à développer chez l'élève les habiletés et compétences essentielles qu'identifie, par exemple, le récent document du Ministère de l'Éducation de la Saskatchewan : *Understanding the Common Essential Learnings.*

En somme, le processus général de l'apprentissage a été inversé. À partir des savoirs, l'on a défini des contenus, des manuels, des situations d'apprentissage, alors qu'on aurait dû recourir au processus inverse et se demander : quelle habileté intellectuelle développer? comment l'étudiant démontre-t-il cette habileté? comment l'étudiant pratiquera-t-il cette habileté? quels contenus de cours offrir à l'élève comme occasion de développer cette habileté? quels travaux lui donner? quelle évaluation effectuer?

Renouveler l'école, c'est baser l'enseignement sur les compétences à acquérir par l'élève. C'est regrouper les professeurs autour de la préoccupation de ces compétences. C'est concevoir les situations d'apprentissage les plus efficaces pour que l'élève maîtrise ces habiletés de base. Concrètement, c'est de se demander comment l'élève sera capable de s'organiser, de suivre un cours, d'apprendre, de répondre à un examen, de chercher, de communiquer. Plus concrètement encore, c'est prévoir un ensemble d'activités, ajustées à chacune des année du cours, qui mènent à la maîtrise de ces habiletés de base. Le défi d'une telle entreprise de formation fondamentale est d'amener les enseignants à se concerter dans la démarche, à assurer, au coeur même de l'école, la convergence des attentes fondamentales de tous les agents éducatifs, mais c'est à ce prix que s'achète la qualité de l'école.

4. Le perfectionnement des enseignants

C'est un euphorisme de dire que c'est le maître qui fait l'école. La qualité du maître tient à deux conditions fondamentales : sa compétence et sa motivation. Si je me fie à mon expérience, il semble que les universités ont fortement accru la formation initiale des enseignants. Elles semblent cependant moins aptes à leur assurer des services de perfectionnement ajusté aux besoins actuels de l'école.

Comme cela se pratique au Québec, au niveau collégial, l'avenir du perfectionnement des enseignants me semble devoir être axé davantage sur l'identification par les enseignants eux-mêmes de leurs besoins, sur l'organisation locale d'activités qui permettent aux enseignants de résoudre leurs problèmes. Plutôt que d'offrir des cours théoriques de sciences de l'éducation, l'université devrait envoyer dans le milieu même de l'école des personnes-ressources qui aideraient les enseignants à résoudre leurs problèmes et à s'améliorer. La pédagogie, c'est dans l'école que ça se passe et non dans la salle de cours de l'université.

II - LA RÉFLEXION DE L'AIES

De la réflexion de l'AIES, je retiens deux éléments : une intervention que faisait récemment M. Arthur Marsolais à l'assemblée générale des directeurs d'études de l'AIES sur *Le soutien pédagogique : pour une pratique fécondée par la recherche* et d'une enquête que vient de mener l'Association auprès des directeurs d'études de ses institutions membres sur les mesures que les écoles privilégient pour améliorer l'intervention pédagogique des enseignants.

1. L'étude de Marsolais

M. Arthur Marsolais avait la tâche de décrire l'éclairage que la recherche apporte au soutien pédagogique. Il tirait de cette revue de la recherche une conclusion générale et identifiait quatre éléments de soutien pédagogique.

Comme nous l'avons fait précédemment, Marsolais conclut que «en matière de soutien pédagogique, ... on ne peut pas faire l'économie de **l'effet institutionnel**». Qu'on l'appelle «éthos», culture institutionnelle ou dynamique de l'établissement, l'école a un effet certain sur l'apprentissage. Se référant en particulier à l'ouvrage de Rutter : *Fifteen Thousand Hours* et à la recherche anglaise de Mortimore : *Schools Matter* (L'école compte), Marsolais rappelle que les élèves les plus faibles performent mieux dans une école excellente que les plus forts confiés à une école médiocre. Quand on pense à l'impact de l'école, on pense globalement aux normes de qualité intellectuelle. La recherche nous mène plus avant. Elle appelle notre attention, par exemple, sur le temps réel que l'élève consacre à l'étude. Elle observe que ce temps réel peut varier de 50 à 90 %, quand on soustrait le temps mis à une foule de petites choses. Lorsque parents, maîtres et direction de l'école travaillent en véritables partenaires et valorisent l'éducation, le rendement des élèves en est substantiellement affecté.

Allant à des pratiques concrètes de soutien pédagogique, Marsolais retient de la recherche quatre pistes d'amélioration.

La première de ces pistes est celle du «curriculum différencié». Il ne s'agit pas des voies québécoises, des «tracks» américaines ou des filières françaises, mais de contenus de formation appropriés aux divers élèves d'un groupe hétérogène. Admettant l'absence d'uniformité dans les apprentissages et renonçant à ce que l'ensemble des élèves se situent à un point identique, «l'art de l'enseignant est plutôt d'offrir une orchestration du travail d'étude et d'apprentissage de l'élève faisant que chacun puisse s'investir positivement sans trop se soucier de se comparer au voisin».

La deuxième piste que retient Marsolais est celle de l'entraînement à des stratégies d'apprentissage et à des méthodes de travail. «Dans un premier temps, on examine quelles sont les façons de faire de ceux qui apprennent bien. Dans un second temps, on s'efforce de les rendre explicites, bien cernées, objectivement décrivables. Dans un troisième temps, on vérifie s'il est possible d'entraîner d'autres élèves à utiliser ces stratégies et si le tout améliore les résultats.» La recherche a démontré qu'on peut enseigner les stratégies d'apprentissage aux élèves et avec profit. Marsolais réfère à la synthèse de la recherche américaine sur le sujet, qu'ont faite Weynstein et Meyer : *The Teaching of Learning Strategies,* dans *Handbook of Research on Teaching.*

La troisième piste consiste à aider l'élève à prendre conscience de sa démarche intellectuelle : c'est la perspective métacognitive. On fait travailler à deux sur des problèmes. «Dans chaque paire d'élèves, l'un cherche la solution du problème, tandis que l'autre agit comme observateur. Le premier doit préciser sa pensée au fur et à mesure qu'il progresse dans la solution d'un problème, en donnant les raisons de choisir une réponse plutôt qu'une autre.» L'élève observateur se concentre sur le processus cognitif de l'autre. Quand son tour vient de résoudre un problème, il améliore petit à petit sa propre stratégie en utilisant ce qu'il a compris en observant l'autre.

La dernière piste retenue par Marsolais est celle de Reuven Feuerstein, l'«enrichissement instrumental». Feuerstein a réfléchi à l'habileté de raisonner, d'analyser, de comparer, de synthétiser. Il a détecté que l'intermédiaire humain joue un rôle majeur dans l'émergence des habiletés intellectuelles de base. De là, il a postulé que les difficultés de l'élève seraient surmontables par un entraînement direct et méthodique, en enrichissement instrumental. Mettant de côté l'effort d'apprendre des contenus particuliers, on se concentre sur les habiletés intellectuelles qui servent d'**instruments** pour apprendre toutes ces choses. L'on aura reconnu là les préoccupations de formation fondamentale du CADRE, d'une formation axée sur l'acquisition d'habiletés intellectuelles de base.

Nous sommes d'accord avec Marsolais sur ces pistes qu'ouvre la recherche à l'amélioration du soutien pédagogique. Cependant, il nous paraît que la voie de l'avenir est celle de la **pédagogie différenciée**. Les recherches démontrent que le système des voies ou filières ne fait qu'élargir l'écart entre les élèves forts et les élèves faibles, qu'accroître l'inégalité des chances. D'autre part, nous sommes convaincus que les classes hétérogènes sont là pour rester. La stratégie de l'avenir consistera à diversifier le travail des élèves dans un groupe hétérogène, à varier la démarche de sous-groupes. Après une période de pédagogie de maîtrise, il conviendra de regrouper les élèves selon leurs besoins, d'ajuster les exercices à leur niveau d'aptitudes.

Dans ce domaine, l'on se référera plus spécialement à l'expérience française. La France a opté pour la formule du collège unique au début des études secondaires. Elle s'est butée au problème des classes hétérogènes. Elle trouve actuellement la réponse à son problème dans la «pédagogie différenciée». Celui qui s'intéresse à la question pourra prolonger sa réflexion à l'aide des documents publiés par Les Amis de Sèvres ou du document produit par le Conseil supérieur de l'éducation : *Des stratégies pour la qualité de l'éducation en France : réforme de système et pédagogie différenciée.* Le mouvement n'est pas d'ailleurs que français comme en témoigne le dernier bulletin du *National Center of Effective Secondary Schools*, où l'on traite spécifiquement des résultats de la recherche sur le «Tracking and Ability Grouping».

L'on ne saurait par ailleurs improviser une pédagogie différenciée. Celle-ci exige une sérieuse planification. Progresser dans cette démarche exige un perfectionnement approprié des maîtres, un allégement de la tâche et une discussion de la stratégie par l'équipe des enseignants de l'établissement.

2. Mesures d'appui pédagogique

D'ici à ce que nous soyons capables d'aller à la pédagogie différenciée, il serait utile de recourir à diverses mesures d'appui pédagogique.

Dans ce contexte, l'AIES a mené auprès de ses 96 établissements membres un sondage sur les mesures d'appui pédagogique utilisées dans les écoles. Soixante-huit (68) écoles, soit environ 70 %, ont participé à l'enquête. Ces mesures sont inégalement prises, mais on peut identifier, par ordre d'importance, les dix suivantes : le titulariat, la récupération, le redoublement d'années, l'allongement du temps alloué aux matières de base, la formation en méthodologie du travail, la reprise d'un cours, les études obligatoires, le tutorat, l'entraide des pairs, l'encadrement du travail personnel.

Le titulariat. L'école charge un enseignant, appelé titulaire, de la responsabilité plus immédiate d'un groupe d'élèves. L'enseignant passe plusieurs périodes avec les mêmes élèves, parce qu'il enseigne plus d'une matière. Il établit avec les élèves d'une même classe une relation plus stable et crée ainsi un climat d'apprentissage favorable.

La récupération. La récupération s'entend ici d'un cours ou de périodes de cours dispensés sous forme collective pour permettre à l'élève de réussir des apprentissages préalables au programme. Après une étape, par exemple, l'école met sur pied pour certains élèves un enseignement dit de récupération, soit après la classe régulière, soit le samedi, où un enseignant s'applique à consolider des acquis indispensables aux apprentissages prévus par le programme.

Le redoublement d'années. L'élève reprend une année pour raison d'échec, mais continue d'être inscrit dans un cheminement régulier; il prend une année nouvelle pour revoir le programme. La formule se distingue de celle du cheminement particulier où l'on peut répartir sur deux ans les objectifs d'un programme prévu pour une année afin de permettre à certains élèves plus faibles de démarrer sur un meilleur pied.

L'allongement du temps alloué aux matières de base. Le concepteur du programme, le ministère de l'Éducation, dans le cas québécois, a prévu un temps normalement requis pour atteindre les objectifs terminaux. L'école augmente le nombre de périodes prévues pour tel ou tel cours. Cette allocation de temps supplémentaire vise les élèves plus faibles; elle peut aussi être un moyen d'enrichir le cours de base.

La formation en méthodologie du travail. Beaucoup de difficultés scolaires s'expliquent par l'absence de méthodes efficaces de travail. Certains élèves ont besoin d'un soutien particulier pour se placer en situation d'apprentissage. Certaines écoles proposent un cours spécifique de méthodes et de techniques de travail, où l'on apprend à l'élève à suivre un cours, à prendre des notes, à faire un résumé, à utiliser la bibliothèque, à préparer un examen. Ailleurs, on a conçu des guides de méthodologies du travail avec lesquels les enseignants, chacun dans leurs cours, travaillent avec les élèves, au moment qu'ils jugent opportun.

La reprise d'un cours. Cette mesure consiste à mettre sur pied un enseignement s'adressant aux élèves qui ont échoué un cours. Habituellement, cet enseignement est dispensé durant l'été, avant la session de reprise d'examens. L'organisation de tels cours de reprise peut relever d'une école particulière ou être le fruit d'une concertation de plusieurs établissements.

Les études obligatoires. Il s'agit de périodes de travail personnel imposé par l'école à certains élèves, soit pendant toute l'année ou pendant un certain temps. L'école impose ainsi à des groupes d'élèves un temps minimal de travail personnel à l'école.

Le tutorat. Par-delà l'aide ponctuelle que tout enseignant donne normalement à tel élève, sous forme d'explications supplémentaires, le tutorat est une formule dite plus systématique. Un enseignant apporte à un certain nombre d'élèves à risque un soutien continu. Cette aide porte sur l'acquisition de meilleures méthodes de travail, mais peut aussi porter sur telle ou telle matière dans laquelle l'élève est plus faible. Selon les écoles, cet enseignant-tuteur est recruté parmi les enseignants de l'établissement et est rémunéré en supplément ou il est spécialement recruté pour cette fonction.

L'entraide des pairs. Des élèves apportent une aide pédagogique ponctuelle ou régulière à d'autres élèves, mais ce service est offert de façon systématique, sous la supervision d'enseignants. L'école se charge de donner une formation appropriée aux tuteurs et assure la surveillance de la pratique du tutorat.

L'encadrement du travail personnel. Il ne s'agit pas ici de récupération, mais d'une aide apportée à un groupe d'élèves pour leur faciliter l'accomplissement de leurs travaux scolaires. Le cadre d'intervention est collectif, ce qui distingue cet encadrement du tutorat. Les élèves désignés ne peuvent se soustraire à ces études dirigées. L'encadrement est assuré par un éducateur spécialisé.

CONCLUSION

Le défi que nous avions à relever dans cette présentation des interventions les plus efficaces de l'école n'était pas facile. Il y avait matière à une série de cours plus qu'à une communication. Nous avons choisi de faire le point sur quelques orientations fondamentales que doit se donner l'école pour rendre l'enseignement efficace. Avec Marsolais, nous avons identifié quelques tendances plus marquées chez les chercheurs et, enfin, nous avons illustré, à l'aide d'une récente enquête auprès d'une centaine d'écoles secondaires, quelles mesures d'appui pédagogique peuvent être prises par les écoles pour améliorer la qualité de la formation. Nous vous remercions.

EFFORTS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE SCHOOLS TO CREATE A MORE LITERATE SOCIETY

ENCOURAGING A LOVE OF READING

John D. O'Leary
Frontier College

In 1897 a young man from Nova Scotia set out to find his brother who was "somewhere out west". Along the way, he was amazed at the difficult conditions people were living and working in. And what really bothered him was that most of the people he met couldn't do anything to change these conditions. They were stuck. Why? Because they couldn't read and write in the language of their adopted country.

This young man, whose name was Alfred Fitzpatrick, eventually found his brother in a redwood forest in California -- over 5,000 miles from home. And his brother, who had been travelling for almost twenty years and working at different kinds of jobs, told Alfred that he was right -- things were terrible out there on the frontier. And no one was doing anything about it.

So Fitzpatrick returned to Canada, borrowed some money and bought some tents. Why tents? His idea was to put these tents in the lumber camps, mining towns and railroad camps up north and out west and down east so that people would have a place to go. To read. To study. To learn.

This became known as the Reading Tent Society, way back in 1899. A little later, it became known as Frontier College. And today, Frontier College is still teaching people how to read and write.

Now Frontier College has started READ CANADA with pretty much the same idea as Fitzpatrick had almost 100 years ago: books, reading and going where people are. In this case, we're going to where children are to get them turned on to books and reading.

Alfred Fitzpatrick died back in 1934. But his dreams live on. And we think he would have liked the idea of READ CANADA.

The READ CANADA program has several important aspects. One of these is Celebrity Reading.

Celebrity Reading

The idea behind Celebrity Reading is simple. It comes from observing children, and understanding what motivates them. Children imitate people they respect and admire. If one of their heroes -- local or national -- reads to them, and tells them that reading is a good thing to do, then chances are children will hear the message in a way they never have before.

In most cases, celebrities are happy to share the gift of reading with young people. Along with reading to children, there is an underlying message from the celebrity: "I wouldn't be here, I would never have done all I have done, if I hadn't been able to read." It's a message the children take to heart, a lesson they remember always.

You are the best person to decide upon the celebrity you would like to invite to participate in the Celebrity Reading program. Your mayor, fire chief, junior hockey star or a local musician, artist or writer are all excellent choices -- and most will be happy to take part in your event. Most readers have a favourite passage they will want to share with the children. However, we at Frontier College have selected passages available should you require them.

Reading Circles

Another important aspect of READ CANADA is the formation of Reading Circles. The idea is so simple...so simple that it works!

Once a week, for an hour or so, you get together and read to a group of children. Or you read with them. Just as long as you don't read at them. Or maybe you just tell stories. The point is, you start to bring books and stories into the lives of these children.

With a little bit of work and imagination, a reading circle can be organized in your community. All you need are people -- children, a few people to read to them, some library books, and a place. And remember to get a place where you can cut loose a bit and enjoy yourselves!

We don't teach reading. Not at all. Instead, we tell a few stories and have a bit of fun so that the children can see for themselves that reading is fun. Will they ever think it's as much fun as a game of shinny or Saturday morning cartoons? Well...that depends on how good a job you do making your Reading Circle fun.

And just because we don't teach reading skills doesn't mean the children don't become better readers. As with most things we do, the more we do it the better we get at it. And the more we like to do it, the more we will do it.

How to Organize Your Very Own Reading Circles

- First, you need a place. A space. Somewhere children go. You know your neighbourhood. There's usually a room in a community centre, a Boys or Girls Club or apartment complex that you get for an hour a week. Don't take no for an answer!

- You've got a space. (Good work!) Now you need books. Go to the library and grab a couple piles of books to use at the Reading Circle. Have more books than children, which brings us to our next point...

- You have to capture their interest. Talk it up in the neighbourhood. Involve the people working at your space. They can help spread the word about your Reading Circle. Word of mouth is always the best form of advertising. But of course for this to work, the children have to have a great time, and have to want to come back -- so make sure they do!

- On the big night, get there a bit early, so you can spread the library books out on a table, arrange name tags and generally get ready.

- When the children arrive, give them their name tags. Put a coloured dot on each name tag to indicate the number of times the child has participated in the Reading Circle.

- The children choose a book, choose a reading partner, and find a cozy corner. One-to-one is best, but if this isn't possible read in small groups.

- Don't get hung up on time lines or quotas. Some children will spend ten minutes on one page, or throw a book away after ten seconds. Don't walk around with a stop watch and a whistle. Let them go at their own pace.

- After 30 minutes or so of reading have everyone form a circle on the floor and share a book. Read a page and then pass the book around the circle -- you get the idea. This is a nice way to bring the group together and to finish off the evening. But whatever you do, don't force anyone to read who doesn't want to!

- Using the name tag, draw for some free books. Ask (or beg!) a local business or bookstore for some book prizes to give away. Keep track of who's winning and who isn't so you can distribute the prizes as equally as possible.

These are just some suggestions that we feel will help your Reading Circle really take off. Use them as a place to start from, but don't let them limit you. When you get the right combination of children and books together in a good setting, anything's possible.

EFFORTS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE SCHOOLS TO CREATE A MORE LITERATE SOCIETY

FINDING AND HELPING LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Cathy Smith
The George Brown College of Applied Arts and Technology

The first thing one must do in order to help those who have learning disabilities is understand what one is dealing with. While this may sound trite, the reality is that there are many adult learners, and even some younger learners with learning disabilities, who have never had a psycho-educational assessment, or who do not understand the nature of their disabilities. In the absence of such understanding, people with learning disabilities often conclude that they are not intelligent enough to learn to read, or they buy into the belief that they are somehow not putting sufficient effort into the learning process. Teachers who do not understand the nature of learning disabilities may also subscribe to these assumptions. The result is learners who believe they cannot learn, and/or teachers who believe they cannot or will not learn.

Learning disabilities refers to one or more discrete areas of disability in a person who, in most respects, is of average, potentially average or above average intellectual potential. People with learning disabilities usually have specific difficulties in one or more types of information processing, such as visual; auditory; motor; social; memory, which in turn causes difficulties in acquiring or using skills such as reading and writing, among others.

Current knowledge does not often provide teachers with secure methods of successfully teaching people with learning disabilities to read and write. In most cases the task of the teacher is to discover, in collaboration with the student, the teaching/learning strategies most likely to yield positive results. This can be revealed through testing, or through informed trial and error. Most of us have a preferred learning style which is most effective for us. For people who have learning disabilities, the "preferred" learning style may be the only effective learning channel. Some may learn best through the auditory channel, in which case the phonetic method of teaching reading will be most useful. Some may learn best through the visual channel, in which case the sight word method would be most appropriate. Some may require a combination of hearing, seeing and writing in order for learning to take place. The most important ingredient is an acceptance on the part of the teacher, (and communicated to the student), that the difficulty in the learning process

is not due to lack of intelligence or lack of motivation, but to some form of neurological dysfunction, which is likely to be overcome by specific teaching/learning strategies. Colour and rhythm can sometimes be effectively employed. When memory is a recognized problem, repetition may be helpful, using a technique often referred to as over-learning. This refers simply to the technique of going over and over the material many many times, before moving on to new material, until one is sure that the student has mastered the material, and will not be likely to confuse it with material that is presented subsequently. The number of times necessary to go over material, and the amount that can be mastered in one learning unit, will be unique to each learner, and will best be discovered by a collaborative effort on the part of the teacher and the learner.

The teacher should be alert to signs of metacognitive dysfunctioning. This refers to difficulties in the executive reasoning abilities, or the ability of the individual to problem solve effectively, to organize an effective approach to learning, to reflect on what has taken place in the learning process, and make necessary adjustments. While the learner is the best qualified to comment on the efficacy of any particular teaching method as it applies to him or her, the role of the teacher is to draw the learner's attention to what has (or has not) taken place and to suggest alternatives. In other words, it is the teacher's responsibility to guide the learner in the evaluation of the teaching/learning process and become an active participant in designing the most appropriate teaching strategies for the situation.

This leads to a related discussion of "learned helplessness" which is often referred to in the literature about learning disabilities. It refers to a situation where the learner has come to believe that he or she is incapable of changing any situation. In the case of learning to read or write, the learner would have reached the conclusion that no matter what she/he did or did not do, nothing would change the fact that she/he cannot read. Such learners have learned over time that their efforts do not usually have any relationship to success, and thus are highly unmotivated to put forth any effort in the learning process, while still being highly desirous of learning to read. They present themselves to the teacher as a receptacle of whatever the teacher wishes to do, without any real belief that any learning will occur, or any sense that some engagement is required from them. Reasons for the development of this state of "learned helplessness" could be the repeated failure experiences despite great effort on the part of the students, arbitrary decisions to promote or retain or transfer students with learning disabilities with little or no discussion with the student, or regard to the effort the student has put forth, to lack of understanding of the students of reasons for their failures to learn previously, or a combination of the above. Helping the students to understand their learning disabilities and to become active participants in the hunt for effective teaching/learning methods is essential to the beginning of renewed attempts at learning.

Literacy teachers should be aware of the signs of hyperactivity/attention deficit disorder in their students as one of the manifestations of learning disabilities. They might notice that their student is easily distracted by noises, by sights, by extreme heat or cold, by changes in routine or any other sensory occurrence which MOST other learners will either take in stride or not even notice. Again, I stress, it is important to know that this type of attention disorder is neurologically based, and no more under the student's conscious control than would be a gun shot in the next room to the "average" person. The best approach here is a combination of removing unnecessary stimulation from the learning environment, and helping the learners to recognize that this is part of their learning disabilities, and teaching them to use relaxation methods, self-talk and other means to counteract the effects of overstimulation. In other words, the learners must learn to bring under conscious control the screening out of extraneous stimulation that happens at an unconscious level for most of us, and they may need the help of the teacher to do that.

There are many manifestations of learning disabilities which this paper does not allow time or space to go into. As a rule of thumb, literacy teachers should be alert to the possibility of learning disabilities when confronted with a student who seems to have the intellectual ability to learn to read, has the desire to learn to read, and yet does not seem to be able to learn as would normally be expected. These guidelines may provide some insight to the types of problems which could account for such an impasse. Teachers are referred to their local Learning Disabilities Association for more information. Understanding what one is dealing with is the beginning of successful teaching for the teacher, and successful learning for the learner.

There may be ways in which an educational or a complete psycho-educational assessment could be provided for the student. The local school board, Learning Disabilities Association or Vocational Rehab Agency are likely places to inquire about such services in your community. While such an assessment may provide insight into the specific problems of a student and give specific directions to a teacher, the majority of learners really can be helped to learn or to accept limitations on learning, by an informed and caring teacher who accepts the reality of learning disabilities, and engages the learner as an active and important member of the teaching/learning team.

When learning does not take place despite the informed efforts of the teacher and the student, it is helpful if the teacher leads the student to an acceptance of the effects of the learning disabilities, and to the development of some compensatory strategies which can be utilized in daily living, such as a visually impaired person might employ. This would include using taped versions of texts and magazines, learning survival word signs, and using the skills they have to communicate in writing without being embarrassed about the level of their skills. This could include learning how to explain their learning disabilities to an employer, bank teller, teacher, etc. The key is always to engage the learner in the process, whether it be in teaching/learning techniques or compensatory techniques.

EFFORTS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE SCHOOLS TO CREATE A MORE LITERATE SOCIETY

SCHOOL-BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Ken Page
The Board of Education for the Borough of Scarborough

The following extract from the Chamber of Commerce's new manual on Business-Education Partnerships describes the background to the partnership idea and offers some suggestions for creating successful partnerships.

SOME HISTORY

The involvement of business in education is not new. For the first half of this century that interest was pervasive. Almost all school board members were business or professional people, and public school management was modeled on business management.

Business leaders and educators readily agreed that an important objective of education was the preparation of students for a productive work life. Curricula, testing, placement, and counselling programs all developed within this comfortable consensus. The prodigious expansion of the public schools after World War II turned out to be the last page of this chapter in the history of business involvement in the schools.

The context of educational policy-making changed swiftly in the mid-to-late 1960s. With those new issues came new actors: organized parent and community groups; organized teachers; advocates of previously neglected groups of students; lawyers and judges; and federal and provincial governments. Thus, in the critical years from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, business leaders were increasingly distant from the schools. Their interest shifted toward the universities. Lacking much contact with most public schools, business leaders tended to believe most of the stereotypes of public schooling that circulated during these years. During this time business leaders felt they could afford to be passively critical of education because of the plentiful supply of qualified entry-level workers among the very large numbers of people born during the postwar baby boom and among women re-entering the labour market.

During the past six to eight years, business leaders have been gradually re-establishing connections with public education. It seems clear that changes in the labour supply have been the most significant spur to this renewed interest in education. These changes have led business leaders to a whole new set of realizations:

- There will be fewer young people entering the labour market -- 20% fewer high school graduates in 1990 than in 1980
- The proportion of women in the labour market will not rise as swiftly in the future as it has in the recent past.
- The skills needed in the workforce are growing increasingly complex and changing rapidly. Individual workers will need to learn new skills continually as their jobs change under the impact of technology and as they change jobs.
- Increased worker productivity will be a necessary ingredient for successful competition in the global economy.
- The schools can do the bulk of the job of educating young people. Employment training programs for youths and company training programs for employees can complement -- but not substitute for -- an effective education system.

Business leaders have come to understand that the emerging labour supply problem is essentially an educational problem. The knowledge and skills required in today's labour force are general rather than specific to any firm or industry. Businesses need employees who can read, write, and compute, but these employees must also be problem solvers, decision makers, effective communicators and willing to learn new skills. Even though concerns for the future workforce have been the catalysts for renewed corporate involvement in education, they have not been the only source of corporate interest. Like most other alert and intelligent members of our society, business people understand that education is our fundamental means of developing skilful and thoughtful citizens. Business needs not only workers from the schools but also consumers, discriminating supporters of the free enterprise system, and creative citizens. Moreover, on the local level, businesses benefit from a community that is seen to be a "good place to do business". A strong school system -- serving present and prospective employees and their families, and contributing to a strong local economy -- is a hallmark of such good places.

As their new self-interest dawned on them, business leaders began slowly, over the past several years, to strengthen ties with and increase assistance to the schools. A somewhat battered and, it must be said, suspicious education community began just as slowly to respond. It took some time for educators to appreciate what

business sought from the schools. The general skills and the ability to learn, grow, and change were genuine educational goals. In particular, business people who have worked with the schools over the past several years have learned three important things, slowly perhaps, but well: education is hard work; educators and students work hard at it; and business people would never put up with the things that educators encounter and cope with daily.

THE CANADIAN SCENE: WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW?

Partnerships are thriving in Canada. Examples of some partnerships include the following: WET (Workplace Educational Training) in Halton and Peel; Partners-in-Education (P.I.E.) in Ottawa; R & D Partnership Projects in Montreal; Adopt-A-School in Stoney Creek; F.O.C.I.S. (Family of Community Industry Schools) in London; P.A.I.R.S. (Partners Active in Resource Sharing) in Sarnia; I.C.A.O. Business Game in Timmins; Innovation and Business Partnerships in Saanich, B.C.; The High School Company Program in Regina, Sask.; Project Business in St. Paul, Alberta; Project N.O.W. (New Opportunities for Work) in Vancouver, B.C.; Project Literacy in B.C.; The Computer Training Program in N.W.T.; Life Skills/Work Study in Saint John, N.B.; Community Related Programs -- Business and Education Together, in Metropolitan Toronto; Youth Communication/Toronto; and many more from every province across Canada.

While every community is different and must work with different resources, just about every idea for a partnership activity or policy has been tried somewhere, sometime. It makes good sense to adopt someone else's program if applicable.

WHAT IS A PARTNERSHIP?

Collaborating to encourage growth and learning in students and employees is a welcome concept. Generally defined, a partnership is ongoing involvement between schools and business/industry, unions, governments and community organizations. Partnerships are established by mutual agreement between two or more parties to establish certain goals, and to construct a reasonable means of achieving those goals. Partnerships are created on virtually any scale. Some involve entire school boards and hundreds of students. Others pair private partners with a single class or even individual students. Partnerships serve business and industry by providing reciprocal activities such as inservice training to employees, use of facilities, student directed projects for example, and software development or marketing research. Partnerships also serve to strengthen instruction in academic skills and to enrich the educational process through the talent, idea power, and unique human resources that can be provided by the personnel of participating businesses.

THE BOTTOM-LINE ISSUE

The present trend of Business-Education Partnerships is focusing on helping to improve the overall educational system and aid in community development as well. Both partners come out ahead. This is the bottom-line in any successful partnership.

SPEAKING OF MONEY

The subject of cost needs to be discussed early in the partnership planning process, and as openly as possible. The emphasis in partnerships is on the utilization of human and physical resources of both partners, for example, skills, talents, hobbies, interests and facilities. Successful partnerships are based primarily on the sharing of human resources such as the provision of employee time, rather than cash donations and monetary awards. Although no commitment of funds is required for participation, occasionally cash donations to support a small aspect of the project are necessary and much appreciated in some situations.

Expenditures for a partnership need not be large; a small amount spent on a specific project can have a meaningful effect. Many partner organizations do ask schools to provide a "wish list" of items they would like to have for their school. The impact of donations of funds from a partner organization can be extended in a variety of ways. Possibilities for involving assistance from a partnership as leverage in a project include:

- publicity for a fundraising project
- sponsorship of one aspect of a fundraising project (e.g. T-shirts)
- loans of supplies and equipment
- donations of equipment
- a joint fundraising effort in the community for a specific school project
- donations of matching funds, with school or community taking responsibility for raising the rest of the funds.

EFFORTS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE SCHOOLS TO CREATE A MORE LITERATE SOCIETY

MOBILIZING THE COMMUNITY TO MEET THE CHALLENGE OF THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Maybelle Durkin
Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation

The Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation had its beginning at the end of the nineteenth century in a growing awareness of the neglect and exploitation of children and distress over mothers' ignorance of health and nutrition. Over a long period of time, knowledge generated by advances in educational philosophy and the study of psychology had served to sharpen public perception of problems identified in literature. As a result, groups of mothers along the northeastern seaboard of North America began to draw the attention of teachers, legislators and doctors to the adverse social effects of industrialization.

With the coming of the post-industrial age and mounting evidence of social dislocation impacting severely on children, families and schools, organizations concerned with their well-being must again effect a considered response to conditions that govern as the twentieth century draws to a close. I would argue, therefore, that the social, economic and cultural implications of the Information Age, the legacy of the micro-electronics revolution, must be taken into account in any discussion of the issue of literacy and the schools.

The reasons are twofold:

There is no evidence that the general public has come to terms with the Information Age. Even the terms "post-industrial society" or "Information Age" are not part of the lexicon. The media tends to dismiss discussion of associated concepts as futuristic and deal with the effects of this revolution in isolation. And yet the potential impact of this new technology is comparable to that of the invention of the printing press. Both the Renaissance and the Reformation were born of the increasing availability of the printed word. Milestones in human history have been marked by advances in methods of communication; the invention of the microchip is proving to be no less significant than those others which have preceded it.

Is it not reasonable, therefore, to extend the concept of literacy that served the industrialized world -- the ability to read and write -- to include an understanding of science and technology, the engine of the age in which we live? After all, the widespread use of the printed word required greater understanding of what was

written and a rejection of forms that impeded meaning, e.g. the use of the vernacular gradually replaced Latin in Western Europe.

The second reason is born of long involvement in public education in North America. It is almost axiomatic; an impoverished environment almost invariably denies the development of a child's potential. The evidence is overwhelming. Children who are nurtured in an environment conducive to learning are more ready to benefit from schooling and to become literate than children who do not receive that form of support in the home or community.

Those two concerns have led to the objective of mobilizing the community to meet the challenge of the Information Age. A five-part project funded by the Secretary of State is now in its fourth phase -- implementation across the country. Thousands of volunteers will become involved before 1990, International Year of Literacy, has drawn to a close. In our experience to date, people see the need for action when they are made aware of the many challenges that confront today's student.

The project, Literacy in the Information Age, encourages local communities to become informed. The key to understanding the approach that lies in the project is based on a perception contained in the following excerpt from Arthur Cordell's Uneasy Eighties, published by the Science Council of Canada in 1985. He said:

> *"The emergence of raw information and, in its structured state, knowledge, as the basic resource and agent of change, is the key to understanding the micro-electronics revolution."*

At the same time, change is the only constant.

- Knowledge is doubling every five years.
- 90% of scientific knowledge has been accumulated over the last 30 years.
- New technologies are changing the nature of work, the workplace and the importance of work to society.
- Knowledge, not goods, is the product; information is bought and sold.
- 70% of Canadians work in the service sector - a major shift from the resource-based industries of the past.
- As jobs are phased out in unskilled areas, workers affected find they do not have the basic skills to retrain.

- Maths and science form the basis that will make it possible for students to pursue further studies in areas that will maximize their ability to function in the new world.

- All developed countries are becoming post-business, knowledge-based societies; human resources are the new capital.

Recognition that "human resources are every nation's greatest asset" presents us with a paradox.

The technological revolution demands that more people become more literate than ever before even as the social and economic changes that result from the growing dominance of science and technology tend to inhibit the ability to meet that requirement. Schools are already reeling with the necessity of dealing with children whose family circumstances are adversely affected by a rapid rate of social change. Of the many difficulties they face, coping with the obligation to impose values to which the community may only pay lip-service is most damaging. The school can only mirror society; ways must be found to make the community recognize the responsibility to espouse clearly-articulated values which may in turn be reflected in education.

The profound nature and extent of the change that is occurring offers the best hope for the future. When we are able to come to terms with the kind of world in which we live, fully accepting its limitations, the home, school and community will have achieved that harmonious relationship marking great cultures in the past.

However, a continuing emphasis on materialism poses an even greater threat to our future well-being as a country. Parents must be made aware of the need to reduce the drop-out rate. Students who take jobs that cut into valuable study time must be discouraged from doing so for reasons other than economic necessity. The long-term economic consequences may otherwise be severe.

Other social factors influencing development of the new "capital" of the twenty-first century include:

- Canada lacks a formal education policy;

- One out of six Canadian children lives in poverty;

- One out of five Canadians is illiterate;

- 30% drop-out rate in the Canadian school system as opposed to 4% in Japan;

- Canada has the lowest number of research engineers and scientists of any other major industrialized country;
- Women form a tiny percentage of students in maths and science at university;
- Individuals may have to be trained for 3 or 4 different careers over the course of their working lives.

Remediation is not a solution in the present circumstances. The community must be mobilized to ensure that children are given every opportunity to avoid a new illiteracy, that threatens to be even more limiting than we have known in the past.

The mechanism we propose to bring together those elements in the community who are interested in, provide services for, or who underwrite the cost of, services to children is called a Literacy Exchange. The term "exchange" recognizes the integrity of each organization involved and their willingness to accommodate and realize the objectives of the project which is to create a literate environment for children.

This community network is first required to review the social and technological changes underway and to consider their implications.

They should examine a number of questions to determine:

What values best serve the needs of children in a rapidly-evolving environment?

What skills are required in the Information Age?

How can we develop the science culture we presently lack?

After that examination, it should be obvious that programs offered to children should now:

- emphasize critical thinking
- enhance reading, writing and numeracy skills acquired in school whenever possible
- promote activities which foster an interest in science, the environment and the natural world.

Creating a literate environment in the community may be encouraged by:

(i) Broadening the application of existing programs

(ii) Integration of new programs into existing approaches to children

(iii) Increasing opportunities for learning in the community.

Children are prepared for formal learning in the home. Self-discipline is a necessary pre-requisite for effective learning: the ability to listen and accept direction from others is an essential skill. Mobilizing the community, above all else, means persuading the parent of the urgency of the problems that confront us as a nation. Their active support of the educational development of their children has never been more essential.

Over thirty Literacy Exchanges are already in place across Canada, but time permits me to discuss only one of them. The Bathurst, New Brunswick Literacy Exchange illustrates the level of creativity of a local community in dealing with the concepts inherent in the project and some of the limitations against which we are struggling.

EFFORTS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE SCHOOLS TO CREATE A MORE LITERATE SOCIETY

TEACHING KIDS TO THINK

John T. Mackey
Middlesex County Board of Education

Thank you for showing an interest in the topic of thinking skills.

The Middlesex County Board of Education has been involved for the past one and a half years in the Ministry sponsored program involving the teaching and learning of thinking skills. Today I would like to share with you some of the insights that we have gleaned from our work in this project. Also, I would like to give you an overview of the project.

The agenda that you have, outlines what I intend to do today. On the back of the agenda are four key questions that I will address. Those questions are:

1) Why do we teach thinking?
2) What is thinking?
3) How is thinking fostered?
4) How can the teaching of thinking skills be introduced?

I will begin by outlining some of the major reasons for teaching thinking. There are three key factors that point to the need for teaching thinking.

The first factor relates to the characteristics of present and future societies. We have moved from an industrial to an information age. It is said that 55% of workers are engaged in processing and communicating information. The rapid expansion of knowledge points to the importance of curriculum that empowers students to locate and process knowledge rather than simply memorize facts. Skills to locate and generate meaning of this massive information will be essential as we move further into a period of information explosion. These skills for making meaning, which are thinking skills, will remain constant. Knowledge, on the other hand, will continue to change rapidly.

The second factor relates to student thinking capabilities. There is evidence that students have a good grasp of basic knowledge and basic skills. However, students are less successful with activities requiring more complex skills, as evidenced in reports such as the International Assessment, *World of Differences*.

The third factor relates to today's teaching methods. Studies have shown that a high percentage of activities provided for students are activities that engage students in the mere recall of information. Classrooms have been dominated by attempts to transmit knowledge or content. There is no denying the importance of knowledge. The more we know, the more likely we are to make sound decisions. However, there is more to education than the attainment of knowledge. Learning how to gather, make meaning of, and use knowledge are also important. Each of these requires the execution of thinking skills.

Now I would like to look at six assumptions on which our project is based. Time won't be taken to explain these assumptions. Hopefully, an explanation will emerge as the presentation unfolds.

Assumption 1:

One's ability to think effectively can improve.

Assumption 2:

Effective, skilful thinking is neither an incidental outcome of experience nor an automatic product of study in a particular subject area.

Assumption 3:

Teaching thinking and teaching thinking skills are not synonymous.

Assumption 4:

The improvement of the operations associated with thinking results in improvement of thinking itself.

Assumption 5:

Teaching of thinking skills can improve achievement in the academic subjects in which the skills are taught.

Assumption 6:

Teaching thinking skills effectively requires that the skills be defined in teachable terms.

I will now address the question, "what is thinking"? To teach a subject well, one must know that subject in considerable depth. In the area of teaching and learning thinking, the subject is thinking. In other words, the content of teaching

thinking is thinking. Thinking is a new subject area for most of us; consequently, many of us have to learn a great deal about the subject. An understanding of thinking can emerge from three things:

1) An understanding of the general nature of thinking,
2) Familiarity with a model of thinking, and
3) Knowledge of some of the specific operations that constitute thinking.

I will now elaborate on each of these three things.

General Nature of Thinking

In short, thinking is the mental process by which individuals make sense out of experience. It engages a multitude of mental operations from recalling to processing to evaluating. Therefore, thinking is a holistic process by which we mentally manipulate sensory input and recalled data for the purpose of formulating thoughts, reasoning, or judging. As informative as such a general definition of thinking may be, it is not precise enough to provide much guidance for teaching thinking effectively. A much more explicit and detailed understanding of thinking is necessary. Therefore, for purposes of teaching, we need to identify the components of thinking in terms of the functions they serve.

Model of Thinking

Now I will present a model of thinking. This is one model which might help you in building an understanding of thinking. It is one way to conceptualize thinking. This particular model was developed by Barry Beyer and is a synthesis of several models. His books are listed in the bibliography that I will provide at the completion of the presentation. As I suggested earlier, thinking is a process, a phenomenon, something that happens. As we examine a model of thinking, you will get the impression that thinking is something that exists. That is not my intent in providing this model. The purpose of examining the parts or components of thinking is to build on understanding of the teaching of thinking.

According to Beyer's model, thinking consists of three components -- operations, knowledge, dispositions. Any act of thinking involves one or more operations, certain kinds of knowledge that are used when performing these operations, and certain attitudes or dispositions. Now I would like to give you a brief explanation of each component beginning with operations.

Operations

Experts agree that thinking consists of some kind of mental activity. This activity can be described, in part, in terms of the operations that the mind seems to perform when thinking. These operations are of two general kinds, cognitive and metacognitive.

Cognitive operations are the operations we do in our minds to generate or find meaning of sensory input. They include complex strategies such as decision making, problem solving or conceptualizing. These strategies are plans of action for accomplishing a task. Cognitive operations also include more discrete, less complex skills such as analyzing, synthesizing, and reasoning skills. These less complex, more discrete skills are often referred to as micro thinking skills. Finally, the cognitive operations include complicated critical thinking skills such as distinguishing what is relevant from what is irrelevant. Critical thinking skills are more complex than micro thinking skills, but less complex than the strategies such as decision making and problem solving. Critical thinking skills are those operations used when trying to judge the worth or accuracy of something. It should be pointed out that complex strategies such as decision making and problem solving consist of different micro and critical skills arranged in different sequences.

The other set of operations is metacognitive operations. These are operations by which we direct and control the cognitive operations being used. They direct us in using problem solving or decision making strategies or seriating or classifying. Generally, these operations involve planning what we're going to do, directing what we're doing, and assessing what we're doing while we're doing it. Several of the sources listed in the bibliography contain suggestions about fostering these metacognitive operations. Someone engaged in thinking does both cognitive and metacognitive operations at the same time.

Knowledge

The second component of thinking is knowledge. Thinking consists of more than just doing. One must think with something, and that something is knowledge. Knowledge consists of three kinds, according to some theorists.

First there is domain -- specific knowledge. This is the knowledge associated with various school subjects. We know that people who think well are people who have considerable knowledge of the topic about which they are thinking. Jerome Bruner said this another way when he said "Discovery favours the well-prepared mind". This subject-specific knowledge is often referred to as content; whereas, thinking skills are often referred to as process. In this connection, then, knowledge or content can be viewed as the vehicle for teaching thinking or process. Conversely,

one might say that process is the vehicle for teaching content. I must caution you, however, that the terms content and process if used only in this sense become very confusing when it is suggested that the content of teaching thinking should be the teaching of process skills.

Secondly, there are general heuristics or "rules of thumb". Heuristics is the Greek word for discover. An example of a heuristics in teaching might be "don't smile until thanksgiving, or laugh until Christmas". An example of a heuristics in learning might be "look before you leap". Heuristics are inventions from our own experience. They activate thinking. These heuristics can be taught to kids.

The third area of knowledge is knowing something about the general nature of knowledge itself. Knowing that knowledge is selective and fragmentary, for example, influences how one thinks.

Attitudes

The third component of thinking is attitudes or dispositions. Attitudes or dispositions support and drive thinking. These are the habits that one is inclined to follow when given free choice. People who are good at thinking are disposed to behave in certain ways. Generally there are two types of attitudes or dispositions. First are those that relate to thinking in general. For example, things like tolerance for ambiguity, willingness to suspend judgement, or respect for evidence are dispositions. Secondly, there are those attitudes that relate to specific operations. Examples of this type are willingness to search for more alternatives and willingness to revise in light of new evidence.

These three components of thinking -- operations, knowledge, and dispositions, are very closely interrelated. Each builds out of and contributes to the others. These components are, in effect, the gears of thinking. As they mesh, thinking occurs. Please remember that thinking is taken apart into components because it helps us teach thinking better. When thinking happens, it does not look like this. But, according to many, having such a concept of thinking is a requisite to developing a thinking program.

Now I would like to look at some of the different techniques or methods used for teaching thinking. These techniques fall into three broad categories: Teaching for, teaching of, and teaching about thinking.

The most popular of these three methods is teaching for thinking. In this method, the teacher creates an opportunity for students to use operations for solving content, subject-matter related tasks. Although this technique may be popular, some of the practices associated with it may not be evident in many classrooms. In spite

of the best teacher intentions to teach for thinking, this technique alone fails to teach thinking. Therefore, some theorists feel that teaching of thinking is necessary.

The teaching of thinking involves engaging students in tasks requiring the kinds of thinking we want them to develop and then explicitly teaching the skill as the occasion and need arise. It should be pointed out that the explicit or direct instruction of thinking does not consist of simply pouring into students' heads a single way to execute a given skill. Instead, it helps students articulate how, why, and when particular operations can be effectively used, and offers expert models on how these operations can be performed.

Finally, is the teaching about thinking. This technique involves helping students consciously think about how they think and helping them purposefully plan and direct their own thinking.

If time had permitted, I would have liked to demonstrate the teaching of a skill. You will have to trust me that the lesson would have illustrated some of the major ideas about the teaching and learning of thinking skills. Instead, I am going to outline some of those ideas for you knowing full well that you haven't experienced some of the things that would have made these ideas more meaningful and real.

1. The thinking skills to be fostered must be identified and organized in some way.

Selecting the skills to be taught is the first act of teaching thinking. The bibliography has references that contain lists of skills. Because there are many skills, a selection has to be made. Unfortunately, a language problem exists with these skills. A given skill often has different labels; therefore, it is important to look beyond the labels to the skill itself. When this is done, it will be apparent that the lists have much in common and that there are many fundamental operations about which the theorists are talking.

In selecting skills, it is necessary to use certain criteria. Two criteria seem to be particularly important. First, is whether the skill has utility outside of school, and secondly is whether the skill is widely used to learn subject matter. Selecting is a demanding task and can produce a lot more heat than light at times. Suffice it to say that an effective program is one in which purposeful attention is given to a whole range of skills.

Organizing these skills for instruction is equally important, perhaps even more challenging. Organizing, according to the literature, involves

A) developing a hierarchy,
B) sequencing these operations across the curriculum, and
C) keying the operations to specific subject areas and grade levels.

Several structures for organizing the operations are described in the references that I will recommend.

2. Defining thinking skills in teachable terms is essential.

Teaching skills directly or indirectly requires that the skills be defined in teachable and observable terms. There are models for defining skills. The model used in our project is described in Barry Beyer's book *Practical Strategies for the Teaching of Thinking*. Simply stated, one can't teach something if he or she doesn't know what it is that is being taught. Without definitions, teaching is nothing more than the provision of opportunities that may or may not result in the learning of the skills. An exercise is available for helping teachers define skills. This exercise begins by giving the teacher a synonym, a definition, and some examples of a skill. Then, the teacher is asked to do the skill and tell how he or she did it. A number of things happen as a result of this exercise. One is frustration. Some teachers say, "I don't know how I did it, I just did it".

It is difficult to think about how you think. The more automatic or second nature the skill is, the more difficult it is to "call up" consciousness about it. Nevertheless, one way to identify what is involved in a skill is to execute it and reflect on how you did it. This is an excellent exercise, but it is challenging and time-consuming. There are other ways of describing skills that I would be pleased to explain in the question and answer session.

At any rate, identifying what is in a skill is something that teachers will have to do in order to understand how to teach that skill. There is no easy place to find these definitions. The literature can be consulted and, in this connection, some of the references in the bibliography I will provide do contain definitions.

3. The learner must become consciously aware of the skill.

Studies on skill acquisition have shown a relationship between learning a skill and the conscious execution of that skill.

4. The teaching of thinking can be integrated with the teaching of subject matter.

Opinions differ as to whether thinking should be taught separate from the subjects taught in school or taught as an integral part of those subjects. Our position and the position of the Ontario Ministry have been to integrate the teaching of thinking with subject matter. Nevertheless, in the project, separate or skill-focused instruction is provided at the time the skill is introduced. In the introduction, care is taken not to hide the skill in the content.

Tasks are available in the literature that will help identify the subjects and subject areas in which certain skills should be developed. Simply stated, one selects what operation is going to be taught and finds subject matter or content in which this operation is likely to be of frequent use.

By teaching thinking in the context of the subject matter or content, the teacher communicates to the students that the skills are useful. Also, by combining the teaching of thinking and content, teachers will see that teaching thinking is not an "add on" to a curricula perceived by many to be heavily burdened with content.

5. Practice is not enough.

Many teaching techniques put students into situations in which they, the students, must execute one or more skills as best they can. These techniques provide practice or opportunities for practice. Many theorists claim that practice is not enough. As indicated earlier, a more effective technique is to engage students in some substantive task requiring the kinds of skills we want them to develop and then to explicitly teach, as the occasion and need arise, the specific operations they need to complete the task successfully.

6. A framework for teaching thinking skills is necessary.

In our project, a certain instructional framework or pattern has been adopted to teach thinking operations. This framework consists of six kinds of experiences for students.

First, the skill is introduced in a way that the focus is on the skill and not the content. To accomplish this, the teacher uses subject matter familiar to the student and centres instruction on one skill.

Next, the student is given guided practice which is frequent and in small chunks, which provides immediate feedback, and which is spaced out over time. This instructive guidance, we have found, is necessary.

Then students are provided opportunities for independent application of the skill.

One and two are teaching of thinking, and three is teaching for thinking. Through all of these steps, students are required to focus on how they think; that is, to say, they are required to think metacognitively.

The next three steps involve teaching for transfer. Transfer literature suggests that skills are tied very much to the context in which they are taught. Most of us can recall occasions when students had learned a skill in one context but had difficulty using it in another context. Students have to be shown how a skill learned in one setting can be used in another setting. This is teaching for transfer.

This instructional framework is based on certain principles of learning thinking skills. These principles are explained in *Teaching Thinking Skills: Theory and Practice* by Joan Baron and Robert Sternberg.

I should like to complete this portion of the presentation by identifying ideas for implementing the teaching of thinking skills.

1. Reading, discussion and reflection

The Bibliography that I will provide you lists a wide range of references, many of which contain a theoretical and practical basis for introducing a thinking skills program. I would like to add to this bibliography the September 1984 issue of Educational leadership. This issue could be used with a staff to generate discussion about thinking and thinking skills. Reading, discussion, and reflection are requisites to an understanding of this topic.

2. Teaching for thinking practices

Secondly, there is much that can be done to improve teaching for thinking practices. You will remember that these are the practices used for creating conditions or opportunities for thinking. One might examine questioning techniques to determine whether questions reflect increasing levels of cognitive skill. Documents like making the grade and classroom questions -- what kinds contain some excellent ideas in this area. In addition, one might examine teacher lesson plans to determine the level of skill reflected in the objectives. There are various models for examining instructional objectives for this purpose. Finally, one might analyze classroom activities to determine the thinking skill or skills they evoke.

3. Teaching of thinking practices

Thirdly, one might consider introducing practices related to the teaching of thinking. As previously explained, to do this one must identify the skills to be taught and define those skills. Dr. Barry Beyer has designed a plan for introducing such a program. He also outlines in his book *Practical Strategies for The Teaching of Thinking* specific strategies for providing direct instruction in thinking skills in any subject area or grade level, as well as for making thinking skills tests and other assessment instruments. Another program built on the principles of direct instruction is *Tactics for Thinking*.

At this point, I would like to describe briefly the project that I have referred to in my comments. Our project is one of six across the province of Ontario involving school-based research and is the result of an excellence-in-learning grant offered by the Ministry two years ago. We received $750,000 to conduct research. Our particular project is exploring whether explicit instruction is more effective than conventional practice in the teaching and learning of thinking skills. We are the lead board of three boards looking at this topic. There are many other elements to this project that I will address in the question and answer session, if you so desire.

4. Staff development

The next factor regarding implementation relates to development of staff members. It may be helpful for you to know the stages of development or understanding one seems to go through in gaining an understanding of the teaching and learning of thinking. My experience has been that teachers go through at least three broad stages of development. Stage one involves the understanding of the concepts of process and content. Stage two involves building an understanding of concepts such as hierarchy and taxonomy, and also involves analyzing instructional objectives and activities in terms of the dimensions previously mentioned. Stage three seems to involve the actual defining of skills and the planning of lessons. In general, it has been my experience that teachers go through the transition described by Elliot Eisner in his definition of professional ignorance. He says that primary ignorance occurs when you don't know something but you know you don't know it, and therefore can do something about it. Secondary ignorance occurs when you don't know something but you don't know you don't know it, and therefore can't do anything about it. Given the complexity of the topic of thinking, the move from secondary ignorance to primary ignorance seems to be the immediate challenge for most of us.

In closing, I would like to leave you with three very brief thoughts about the teaching of thinking. First, someone said that "if you make people think they're thinking, they'll love you. If you really make them think, they'll hate you". This will be the reaction of many students and teachers. Teaching thinking is not easy because it is, in many respects, brand new.

The second is a thought by Thomas Edison who said "things you really want to work well, just don't work that way on their own. You've got to make the damn things work".

And finally, there is an idea expressed in a book called *Teaching for Thinking*. This particular idea, I believe, captures the importance of thinking to education. That idea is expressed as follows:

> *As we see it, the good life is associated with zestful living, and zestful living is, over and over again, associated with a life that both creates problems and creates opportunities for working with the problems. Man may be a reed, but as has been said, "he is a thinking reed"; and where he can think, and where ideas can be put to test in the marketplace, life is richer and life is better. Where our schools have these aims, and where teachers have the competence to put these aims into operation, school life too will be richer and better for teachers and students.*

LES EFFORTS À L'INTÉRIEUR ET À L'EXTÉRIEUR DES ÉCOLES POUR CRÉER UNE SOCIÉTÉ PLUS ALPHABÉTISÉE

LA RÉ-INSERTION DES DÉCROCHEURS

Paulette Bak
Ontario Ministry of Education

Dans le meilleur des mondes, il n'y aurait pas lieu de parler de programmes de ré-insertion des décrocheurs car nous aurions depuis longtemps réglé le problème des abandons scolaires prématurés, mais le millénaire n'est pas encore arrivé et il nous faut encore conjuguer pour quelque temps avec la réalité qui nous entoure. le fait demeure que des élèves, encore en trop grand nombres, choisissent de ne pas complèter les exigeances du diplôme selon de même échéancier que leurs pairs. Certains et certaines choisissent de revenir à l'école, soit dans le contexte d'une école régulière, soit d'une école alternative ou de l'éducation permanente. Pour assurer le succès de cette ré-insertion, examinons les caractéristiques de programmes qui jouissent de succès sous les rubriques suivantes: la pertinence du programme scolaire, les stratégies d'enseignement, la dimension humaine et les services d'appui.

La différence la plus marquée entre l'élève qui complète avec succès des études secondaires voire même, post-secondaires et l'élève qui abadonne ses études avant l'obtention de son diplôme est la capacité du premier de se fixer des objectifs à très long terme. Cet élève peut envisager des études universitaires de plusieurs années afin d'accéder à une profession désirée tandis que l'élève qui risque de décrocher doit percevoir la pertinence immédiate de tout ce qui est au programme d'études. Cette caractéristique pose un important défi aux enseignants et au enseignantes de ce dernier type d'élève. Afin de rapprocher le programme d'enseignement du vécu de l'élève il faut axer son enseignement sur des exemples tirés de la réalité des expériences de l'élève. L'éducation co-opérative peu s'avérer une source très riche de situations qui peuvent servir à alimenter l'enseignement en salle de classe. Pour ce faire l'enseignant ou l'enseignante de mathématiques, de française ou d'anglais doit, soit auprès de l'employeur, soit aupès de la personne affectée à la supervision de l'élève en milieu de travail des habiletés ou connaisances requises pour bien effectuer les tâches de cet emploi. Ensuite, il faut répondre au éxigences du programme tout en utilisant les exemples tirés du milieu de travail. Il ne faut pas sousestimer la difficulté de ce faire tout en demeurant confiants de la possibilité de réussir. Pour l'élève qui réintègre l'école dans le but d'obtenir son diplôme, la pertinence du programme scolaire est primordiale. Cette pertinence doit non seulement exister dans la réalité mais elle doit aussi être percue par l'élèves aux liens qui sont établis entre la salle de classe et le monde du travail.

La ré-insertion scolaire des décrocheurs ne se fera avec succès que grâce à un très haut dégré de professionnalisme de la part de l'enseignant ou de l'enseignante chargé de ce programme de ré-insertion. Par professionalisme, il faut entendre: une habilité bien développée à diagnostiquer les lacunes dans l'apprentissage antérieur de l'élève, un vaste répertoire de stratégies d'enseignement, une attitude positive envers l'élève, sa volonté et sa capacité d'apprendre ainsi qu'un bon sens de l'humour. L'évaluation de l'apprentissage antérieur de l'élève doit viser non seulement les acquis scolaires mais les expériences qui auraient pu permettre à l'élève d'atteindre certains objectifs des programmes d'enseignement à l'extérieur du contexte scolaire. En tant qu'enseignant ou enseignante, il faut accepter en toute humilité que l'école n'a jamais eu et n'aura jamais le monopole du savoir. Par contre, l'élève peut souffrir de lacunes sérieuses au niveau des habilités fondamentales, lacunes qui auraient pu contribuer à son abandon scolaire. Il faut donc déceler ces lacunes sans pour autant rabaisser l'élève et l'attaquer dans son concept de soi qui pourrait déjà être assez fragile.

L'enseignant ou l'enseignante responsable d'un groupe d'élèves qui tâchent de reprendre leurs études à la suite d'un abandon prématuré doit faire preuve d'une grande flexibilité en ce qui a trait aux stratégies d'enseignement. Il faut quasi faire preuve de virtuosité au niveau du métier. Il se peut fort bien que l'approche traditionnelle, livresque, magistrale ait contribuer au décrochage de l'élève en premier lieu donc il faut s'assurer de ne pas répéter les erreurs du passé. Dans la pratique, cela veut dire qu'il faut établir dans la classe un climat de collaboration tant dans le sens vertical qu'horizontal. Tous doivent être responsabilisés de l'apprentissage et l'évaluation du rendement des élèves doit refléter une appréciation de cette responsabilité collective. Cette nouvelle approche va l'encontre du régime compétitif qui règne dans la majorité des salles de classe du type traditionnel.

En plus de l'atmosphère à établir en salle de classe, l'enseignant ou l'enseignante doit miser sur le vécu de l'élève réintégrant le milieu scolaire en privilégiant une approche expérientielle. Dans toutes le situations d'apprentissage ou cela s'avère possible il faut faire appel au matériel manipulatif, aux études de cas, aux jeux de rôles, aux simulations, afin de s'assurer que les connaissances et les habilités à acquérir par les élèves collent le plus possible à la réalité qui entoure l'école. Malheureusement, à très forte proportion, les enseignants et les enseignantes ont été socialisés à croire que l'apprentissage n'est possible que dans une salle de classe silencieuse, bien rangée et bien ordonnée. Cette croyance, n'a toutefois, pas sa raison d'être dans le réalité. Il faut espérer que confrontées aux gains réalisés par les élèves au niveau des habilités et des connaissances, les personnes de métier seront convaincues d'abandonner leurs croyances périmées.

La qualité des relations inter-personnelles qui entoureront l'élève peuvent avoir une influence prononcée sur son succès scolaire. Très souvent ce qui retiendra à l'école le décrocheur ou la décrocheuse en puissance sera le fil très fragile d'une

amitié qui se sera développée entre l'enseignant ou l'enseignante et l'élève. L'intérêt que l'on portera à ses études, à son travail, à ses préoccupations l'assurera du respect qu'on lui porte comme être humain et renfocera son concept de soi quelque peu abîmé par les expériences peu valorisantes déjà encourues à l'école.

Si la qualité de la pédagogie peut garantir l'apprentissage, et la qualité des relations inter-peersonnelles peuvnet avoir une influence positive sur le concept de soi, c'est la persévérance de l'élève dans le programme de ré-insertion. Le mode de prestation de ces services doit être holistique et compréhensif. Les conditions pouvant mener à un deuxième décrochage peuvent être aussi diverses que les élèves eux-mêmes. Ce n'est qu'en s'attaquant à toute la gamme de problèmes qui peuvent assaillir l'élève qui tente de reprendre ses études que l'on pourra assurer avec un certain degré de certitude l'obtention du diplôme visé.

Malgré toutes les conditions décrites ci-haut, il faut admettre en toute humilité que jusqu'à date nos succès dans la ré-insertion des décrocheurs et des décrocheuses n'ont pas été des plus brillants. Peut-être faudr-t-il s'en remettre pour l'instant à faire en sorte que ces élèves demeurent accrochés à l'école du premier coup.

THE VIEW FROM THE CLASSROOM

THE TEACHERS AND LITERACY STUDY

Preliminary Findings

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INTRODUCTION

The Teachers and Literacy Study was conducted by the Social Program Evaluation Group of Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario for the Canadian Teachers' Federation. Funding was provided by the National Literacy Secretariat. The purpose of the study was to survey Canadian teachers for their perspective on the nature and extent of literacy problems within their classes, on the factors affecting their students' literacy development and on those actions, strategies and resources that are effective in promoting the literacy of students having difficulties. Information was collected in two phases: (1) focus group interviews, and (2) a questionnaire survey. This presentation refers to the preliminary findings.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Over 100 teachers were interviewed across grade levels and disciplines in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax and surrounding areas. In some instances, consultative and administrative personnel also participated. The interviews took place in small groups and explored the most salient literacy issues perceived by teachers, the kinds of instructional and programming efforts taken to improve students' literacy and recommendations teachers wished to express. Interviewees' concerns and ideas were, then, incorporated into the design of the questionnaire, which continued to evolve through the exploration of views and testing of items during the interviews.

Elementary and secondary-level versions of the questionnaire were developed. Teachers from all subject areas and in other capacities (e.g., teacher-librarians) were asked to participate in the survey. The framework for "literacy" in this study was presented in the context of schooling. The researchers developed a literacy guide,

based on the literature, refined the guide in the interview phase and included it in the questionnaire to provide teachers with a common conceptual framework for considering students with difficulties. The guide encompassed the areas of reading, writing, oral communication and mathematics at a basic and critical competence level.

In addition, a two-page questionnaire was sent to each principal in order to examine principals' views on literacy.

In the initial section of the teacher questionnaire, teachers were asked to base their responses on the last class they had taught prior to completing the questionnaire. The second section had responses based on two students chosen from this class who were having literacy difficulties at a basic and critical level. Teachers not in a classroom setting or not encountering students with literacy difficulties were requested to provide recommendations, comments and their definitions of literacy in the final section.

A sample of schools was systematically chosen to represent each province and to enable an analysis on a regional level. The number of schools to be surveyed (n=627) was determined by the targeted number of teachers (10,290). The numbers were augmented to include a 37 percent oversample which would ensure that results would be representative within a range of plus or minus 4 percent on dichotomous items (e.g., a yes/no response) at a 95 percent level of confidence. The school representatives of the teacher associations and unions and, in some cases principals, were asked to be responsible for distributing the questionnaires to and collecting them from all professional staff in the schools.

RESPONDENTS

The majority of respondents to the teacher questionnaire were classroom teachers (79%). The remainder had different school roles -- mostly resource teachers, guidance counsellors, teacher-librarians and administrators. The sample was comprised of an even distribution of teachers from across the grade levels except for a slightly higher representation of primary teachers: K-3 (31%), 4-6 (23%), 7-9 (23%), 10-13 (23%). Teachers across all the disciplines responded to the questionnaire and, as expected, teachers of the Humanities made up the largest proportion of respondents in the higher grades.

Seventy per cent (n=439) of the principals responded to the principal questionnaire; the returns were spread evenly from across Canada.

Data entry of late returns continues, but the returns as of March 1, 1990, were received from 59 percent of the targeted number of teachers. The lower than

anticipated return rate is a result of a number of factors including the time the questionnaires were received by teachers (during pre-Christmas activities) and the length and complexity of the questionnaire. Also, some teachers' refused to participate because they preferred to consider literacy development of students in the context of language arts and others found teaching for "literacy" unrelated to their specific subject areas.

SUMMARY AND FINDINGS TO DATE

The following discussion represents a summary of findings based only on preliminary analyses. The final analysis and report will be completed in the fall of 1990.

Secondary teachers were asked to generally compare their students' literacy today versus 10 years ago. Over one-third indicated that fewer of their students are literate today. Slightly more than one-quarter felt that more students are literate and another one-quarter reported no change.

The quality of students' literacy was considered lower than that of 10 years ago by two-fifths of teachers. One-quarter perceived a higher quality of literacy and one-fifth believe that nothing has changed.

***In summary, when comparing students' literacy to that of 10 years ago, over one-third of teachers indicated fewer of their students are literate today and, two-fifths believed the quality of their students' literacy had deteriorated.**

Between 5 percent (elementary level) and 25 percent (secondary level) of teachers reported that not one of the students in the class upon which their responses were based was experiencing literacy difficulties. Approximately one-quarter of the teachers from the intermediate/senior grades and one-third of teachers from the primary/junior levels indicated that between 10 and 20 percent of their students have basic difficulties. Up to 12 percent of teachers reported that over one-half of their students have basic difficulties.

Higher proportions of teachers (20-40%) said their students were not having critical literacy difficulties. One-quarter to one-third of teachers indicated that 10 to 20 percent of their students experience critical competence difficulties.

***In summary, highly variable proportions of students in a given class have literacy difficulties (basic and critical). Teachers' reports range from none to over one-half of their students experiencing difficulties.**

About one-fifth of teachers reported that the literacy development of at least 30 percent of their students having difficulties was affected by the presence of an impairment or disability. The same proportion was affected by cultural differences as reported by 18 percent of teachers. In addition, ten per cent of teachers indicated that learning English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) was an influencing factor for at least 30 percent of students. An examination of those example students with an impairment/disability affecting their literacy revealed that a learning disability was indicated in over one-half of the cases.

Some of the most common "other factors" teachers perceived as affecting their students' literacy development were related to the child's home environments, social/emotional variables, and the lack of early identification of difficulties and interventions to ameliorate them.

***Multiple factors affect literacy development. The most commonly mentioned factors were learning ESL, cultural differences, impairments/disabilities, home environment, social/emotional problems and lack of early identification and intervention.**

The two actions reported by the most teachers as being effective in promoting the literacy of students having basic difficulties were "presenting material differently to student" (from the way it is presented to the rest of the class) (69%) and "working one-to-one with the student" (81%). The teachers provided many examples of strategies they used in presenting material differently and providing individual attention to accommodate the variability of student needs and learning styles: verbal help in all exams, audio-visual material, multicultural materials, presentations by community members of the same ethnic backgrounds as students, experiential learning activities, peer and cross-age tutoring. "Training/professional development opportunities" was an option selected by between 36 and 45 percent of teachers (depending on the grade level) to help them address literacy difficulties. During an interview, one teacher pointed out:

> *There's been a whole transition in education; the whole idea of teaming and working with others, using peer tutors, using volunteers and all other strategies to increase the one-to-one contact is being done in a situation where teachers work very much in isolation from one another and there's been very little training in terms of how do you use other people.*

At least 80 percent of those teachers having access to trained professionals (special education teachers, resource/learning assistance teachers, counsellors, teacher-librarians) reported that interaction with these personnel was helpful to them in working with students having literacy difficulties. Also, teachers having access to teaching assistants and volunteers indicated (86% and 83% respectively) that their assistance was helpful in working with students having literacy difficulties.

***Teachers desire training and access to trained professionals to deal with the variability of students' literacy-related problems.**

During the focus group interviews it became apparent that many teachers remain very traditional in their teaching styles (that is, they use mainly teacher-directed methods), especially in senior grades, and fewer teachers use methods that are very student-centered. Teachers responding to the questionnaire were identified as teacher-directed or student-centered, depending on the methods they reported using most of the time. Three-quarters of teachers were found to be teacher-directed and one-quarter of teachers student-centered. When the responses of these two groups were compared on the strategies they considered most and least effective in promoting their students' literacy development, despite the high degree of variability, some trends were evident. The methods that were identified by the highest proportions of teachers as most effective and reported by the fewest proportions as least effective were "review", "teacher conferencing with student", "student writing", and "cooperative learning or group work". While review is incorporated by over 80 percent of teachers at least two to three times per week, the other three methods are used with this frequency by less than 70 percent of primary/junior teachers and less than 50 percent of intermediate/senior teachers.

An examination of the effectiveness of various groupings in promoting the literacy of students with difficulties revealed that at least three-quarters of teachers at all grade levels report individual, small group and pair work as effective. These groupings, however, are used by up to 20 percent of teachers less frequently than whole class instruction. The latter received less support in terms of its perceived effectiveness with students having literacy difficulties.

***Many teachers identified student-centered approaches as effective in promoting literacy development. But most teachers use traditional, teacher-directed approaches, especially in senior grades. Therefore, teachers require more extensive training in the use of student-centered approaches.**

From a list of twelve options, teachers were asked to specify those which would best help them address the literacy difficulties of their students. Among the options that received the most attention were "opportunity to plan" and "greater coordination among people/services involved with students".

***Teachers require more time to plan as well as to collaborate with parents, other teachers and specialists in order to be more effective in addressing the literacy difficulties of their students.**

TEACHERS' DEFINITIONS OF LITERACY

As previously explained, in responding to questions about their students' literacy, teachers were asked to refer to a literacy guide given in the questionnaire. Later in the questionnaire, they were asked to give their own definitions. Generally, teachers' (as well as principals') definitions fell into three categories. The most prevalent was a functional definition emphasizing the performance of tasks or activities necessary to function in our society. Definitions within a second category, characterized by an absolute nature, invariably mentioned a standard or criterion (e.g., reading level, a grade level). Thirdly, definitions focused on skills beyond the basic level to include more complex information-processing skills. The definitions included a wide array of communication modes: listening, speaking, reading, writing, computing (mathematics), visual arts, technology. However, reading and writing were mentioned most frequently.

PRINCIPALS' RESPONSES

Principals reported that they promote literacy in their schools through internal or in-school activities, facilitating literacy activities with parents, encouraging literacy-related community undertakings and carrying out school board initiatives. The development of literacy is specified formally as a school objective in slightly more than one-half of the schools.

CONCLUSION

The interview and questionnaire responses indicate that many teachers are concerned about literacy and care a great deal about the progress of their students and exploring ways to help them succeed. Aware of social, financial and school-based organizational conditions that often impede students' learning, teachers clearly require the support which will enable them to implement methods that better promote the literacy development of all students. Promoting literacy, however, is a complex issue that defies simple solutions and requires the collaboration and commitment of many players. Stated by one grade eleven social studies teacher, "Improving literacy should be everyone's concern, and the education system, with help from community and business, should be leading the way".

QUE FAIT-ON MAINTENANT?

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Je remercie la Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants de m'avoir invité à prendre la parole sur le thème : Que fait-on maintenant?

Les présentations et les discussions qui ont eu lieu pendant ces trois jours ont été extrêmement intéressantes et ces discussions ont fait surgir un très grand nombre de réflexions.

Il n'y a pas eu de consensus au niveau de la définition de ce qu'est l'alphabétisation. Un membre d'un groupe de discussion auquel je participais a signalé le fait que les gens qui ne sont pas alphabétisés savent ce dont ils ont besoin, que ces personnes savent là où elles veulent aller en terme de lecture, en terme d'écriture, en terme de compter, afin de participer de façon plus active et plus dynamique à la vie de notre société.

Mais comme le faisait remarquer, M. Bisaillon lors de sa présentation, au Canada, l'alphabétisation est une cible mouvante. C'est une cible mouvante en deux dimensions, horizontale comme verticale. Vertical en ce sens qu'on semble élever de plus en plus le seuil de compétence; on n'a qu'à voir les exigences qui sont placées sur les personnes lorsqu'elles veulent avoir une position ou un poste quelconque. Il y a plusieurs années, la fin d'une 10e année était suffisante, maintenant, même la fin d'un cours secondaire ne suffit plus; ce n'est même plus un diplôme de base qui est reconnu en terme d'obtention d'un emploi, dans beaucoup de situations.

Donc il y a cette cible verticale qui continuellement va en augmentant, mais il y a également une cible qui va vers l'horizontal. Il n'y a pas de consensus sur ce que doit contenir cette alphabétisation. Et ça peut aller, on l'a entendu en fin de semaine, d'une perspective de base où on apprend à lire, à écrire et à compter, mais également ça peut aller jusqu'à cette définition que nous a donnée le professeur Wells lorsqu'il nous a dit qu'être alphabétisé, c'est d'avoir cette disposition qui nous engage avec des textes de différents types dans des façons appropriées et qui nous permettent par l'action, par la pensée et par le sentiment, d'entrer dans des activités sociales signifiantes. On a même parlé ce matin d'une alphabétisation spirituelle.

Si l'on ne peut pas s'entendre sur une définition générale et consensuelle, pendant cette conférence, il sera quasi impossible d'obtenir ce consensus dans la société en général.

Mais peu importe la définition sur laquelle nous pourrions nous arrêter, ce qu'il est important de se rappeler, et on l'a signalé à plusieurs reprises ici pendant la conférence, c'est le fait qu'une grande partie de cette problématique se joue avant que le jeune n'arrive au secondaire. Je dirais donc que l'alphabétisation sera proactive jusqu'à l'entrée au secondaire et récupérative pour les élèves du secondaire et la population adulte.

Alors peu importe ce que veut dire alphabétisation, il sera important de s'assurer que les élèves seront outillés à la base pour réduire le plus possible la récupération. Je reviendrai donc sur la part de l'école dans cette alphabétisation un peu plus tard dans la présentation.

Je voudrais présenter certaines réactions à des commentaires qui ont été faits pendant cette conférence. Nous entendons souvent, et surtout de la part des gens qui sont dans l'industrie, que nous devons mieux mesurer ce qui se passe à l'école et que cette mesure peut mieux être assurée lorsque nous utilisons des examens ou des tests standardisés. On utilise des termes comme contrôle de la qualité, produit de l'enseignement et toute une série de termes liés à l'industrie et au commerce.

J'ai toujours eu des hésitations à me joindre à la dernière mode, parce que si à l'heure actuelle le langage de l'administration des affaires est beaucoup utilisé dans le domaine éducationnel, et les méthodologies qui y sont suggérées se comparent aux méthodologies utilisées dans l'industrie, il faut se rappeler que dans l'industrie, c'est la mode à l'heure actuelle. Il y a eu depuis le début du siècle plusieurs propositions de fonctionnement de l'industrie, depuis la chaîne de montage jusqu'à la démocratisation de la chaîne d'assemblage vers l'unité de production. L'industrie croit beaucoup dans ce modèle à l'heure actuelle, mais elle croyait dans le modèle antérieur il y a 50 ans. Est-ce à dire que la mode industrielle actuelle sera celle du futur, pour la fin des temps? J'en doute. Je suis persuadé que viendra de quelque part un nouveau modèle de fonctionnement industriel qui remplacera le présent engouement pour les méthodes japonaises. Il ne faut donc pas que le système d'éducation se calque uniquement sur le modèle industriel. Il faut peut-être en prendre et en laisser; il faut en prendre ce qui, de la perspective des éducateurs et des éducatrices peut être applicable d'une manière profitable pour le système d'éducation et laisser ce qui peut être dangereux pour l'éducation des jeunes.

Rappelons-nous que nous travaillons avec des humains et que l'industrie travaille à produire des pièces. Il y a donc une différence énorme entre une chaîne de montage qui vise à produire un outil et l'école qui vise à rendre des individus fonctionnels dans une société démocratique.

Je voudrais prendre quelques instants pour discuter de cette idée que les instruments standardisés d'évaluation peuvent nous permettre de produire une meilleure éducation.

Quelqu'un faisait le commentaire dans la première journée que l'on avait trouvé dans la recherche Second International Maths Study (SIMS) qu'il y avait une corrélation entre le nombre d'élèves dans une classe et les résultats en mathématiques. Il faut examiner ce qui s'est vraiment passé dans cette étude. Il est vrai qu'il y a une corrélation entre le résultat en mathématiques et le nombre d'élèves en salles de classe. Cependant, cette corrélation elle est très faible. Elle a été influencée par les classes très nombreuses que nous retrouvons uniquement au Japon, parce qu'ailleurs, dans les autres pays, il y a peu ou pas de variation dans le nombre d'élèves par classe. Et les gens qui sont responsables de cette étude ont conclu que l'on ne peut vraiment se fier à ces résultats pour porter des jugements solides de l'impact du nombre d'élèves par classe sur le rendement. D'ailleurs, les résultats d'une recherche longitudinale qui paraîtra à la fin de l'année suggérera qu'il y a peu ou pas de corrélation entre les résultats et le nombre d'élèves en salle de classe... en 8e année, partout dans le monde, ne varie pas beaucoup.

Un livre très intéressant a été écrit pour celles et ceux qui veulent vraiment étudier dans le détail ce type de recherche. C'est le livre de Les McLean - Lesson to Administrator on Large Scale Studies. Il attire l'attention des administrateurs et des administratrices au fait que ces grandes études doivent faire preuve d'une certaine humilité, dans ce sens que nous mesurons une bande très mince de ce qui se passe dans la salle de classe et qu'on ne doit pas en tirer des conclusions ou des causalités qui pourraient endommager le système d'éducation tel qu'il existe et risquer de servir à trivialiser l'enseignement et le travail du personnel enseignant.

Il faudra d'ailleurs que la Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants et tous ceux intéressés par ce sujet surveillent beaucoup les activités du Conseil des ministres de l'Éducation du Canada dans son activité présente pour trouver des indicateurs nationaux. La recherche dans ce domaine, démontre qu'il ne faut pas utiliser des instruments simplistes parce que les résultats seront simplistes. J'en donne pour exemple le document A World of Differences : An International Assessment of Mathematics and Science, qui a été publié par Educational Testing Services aux États-Unis. La méthodologie utilisée a été beaucoup remise en question par les spécialistes dans le domaine. C'est très attrayant mais c'est très superficiel comme résultat et on ne peut en tirer aucune conclusion utile. Une critique de ce document paraîtra d'ailleurs bientôt dans le Educational Researcher. J'espère que celles et ceux qui sont responsables auprès du Conseil des ministres de l'Éducation du Canada de la mise sur pied de ces indicateurs nationaux en prendront connaissance et en tireront des leçons utiles.

Je voudrais prendre quelques *instants pour discuter* des coûts énormes supposément encourus par les systèmes d'éducation canadiens.

On nous dit que nous dépensons plus per capita que toutes les autres nations industrialisées, et que nous ne sommes pas en tête quand vient le résultat. Je pense qu'il faut se rappeler les paroles de M. Terrence Hunsley lorsqu'il a parlé des coûts sociaux énormes imputés à la sous-scolarisation. Il y a également des différences entre les sociétés des différents pays. Il faut continuellement rappeler aux gens qui veulent nous culpabiliser pour des coûts élevés de l'éducation nationale, de cette réalité. Si les Japonais avaient à chauffer leurs écoles comme nous avons à le faire, s'ils étaient tellement dispersés en terme démographique qu'ils devaient utiliser un système étendu de voyage par autobus, s'ils avaient à enlever des montagnes de neige qui tombe sur nos cours d'école, il est certain que leurs coûts d'éducation eux aussi en prendraient pour leur rhume. D'ailleurs, économiquement, il y aurait une solution très facile pour réduire les coûts de l'éducation au Canada. Il suffirait que tout le monde déménage à Toronto et qu'on ne fasse l'éducation qu'en anglais. Mais ce n'est pas le genre de choix que les Canadiennes et les Canadiens ont fait jusqu'à maintenant. Il faut donc cesser de se culpabiliser ou de se faire culpabiliser par celles et ceux qui nous reprochent les coûts élevés de l'éducation. Ce sont des coûts sociaux que nous devons absorber parce que nous voulons un pays tel que nous l'avons présentement. C'est un choix de société et c'est un choix de société que je nous encourage à maintenir.

Et maintenant, que peut faire notre système d'éducation? On nous a parlé de la corrélation élevée qu'il y a entre le milieu socio-économique difficile, les résultats scolaires et l'alphabétisation. Il faudrait donc, si l'on veut diminuer les coûts de la récupération des gens qui n'ont pas été bien alphabétisés, il faudrait donc intensifier nos efforts au niveau de l'école élémentaire et de la petite enfance. Dans les milieux socio-économiques difficiles, dans les familles monoparentales pauvres et même chez la classe moyenne, il faut s'occuper de la petite enfance beaucoup plus tôt que ne le fait l'école à l'heure actuelle de façon générale.

Pourquoi pas des cours d'éducation publique pour les parents. Il est étrange n'est-ce pas que l'on recommande aux futurs parents d'aller suivre des cours prénataux, mais qu'on ne semble pas se préoccuper des familles une fois l'enfant né. Je crois qu'une très grande partie de la population se prévaut des cours prénataux, du moins pour le premier enfant. S'il est si important de le faire lorsque l'enfant n'est pas né, ne serait-il pas nécessaire de le faire pour les parents des nouveau-nés? Pourquoi ne pas tenter de rendre ordinaires, accessibles, désirables et publics des cours qui montreraient l'importance du développement de l'enfant à son plus jeune âge et l'impact que les parents peuvent avoir sur ce développement? Si les gens de la classe moyenne, de la classe riche peuvent se permettre de choisir une pouponnière de qualité, ou une gardienne bien motivée, bien organisée pour leurs enfants, il faudrait aussi pouvoir assurer cet accès à celles et à ceux qui n'en ont pas les moyens.

Il est évidemment facile de placer un enfant devant la télévision pour de longues périodes. Mais si la télévision peut être utile à certains moments, ce n'est pas l'outil le plus utile pour assurer le meilleur développement de l'enfant en très bas âge. Il faudrait favoriser la création de bibliothèques de livres et de jouets pour les jeunes enfants dans le milieu scolaire, de services de garderies partagés. Il faudrait peut-être que l'école s'ouvre davantage à son milieu; c'est l'école et le personnel enseignant qui profiteront plus tard de la présence de ces enfants.....

Il serait peut-être bon que l'école puisse offrir des ressources, à la communauté en offrant locaux, suggestions, appui, (pas nécessairement de la part des enseignantes et des enseignants, mais d'autres intervenants dans la communauté). L'école doit devenir, même pour le très jeune enfant, un milieu naturel, un milieu de ressources, si elle veut être une véritable école de la communauté. Il faudrait répandre partout au pays le type de programme qui vient d'être instauré en Ontario et qui est peut-être présent ailleurs : Lorsqu'on bâtit une nouvelle école, à partir de maintenant, il faut automatiquement y intégrer une garderie. Cette garderie peut être pour la petite enfance comme elle peut être pour les enfants plus âgés, avant ou après l'école. C'est une garderie qui doit être éducative puisqu'elle est associée à l'école.

Pour ceux et pour celles qui ne peuvent pas avoir accès, il faudrait un plus grand contrôle sur les personnes qui gardent les enfants durant la journée. Il faudrait trouver un moyen de contrôler la qualité des services qui sont offerts par les personnes qui demeurent à la maison et qui ont un, deux, trois, cinq enfants à garder au cours de la journée. À tout le moins, il faudrait leur offrir des cours menant à un certificat en développement de l'enfant. Je crois que les parents, comme la société, sont en droit d'attendre un service de qualité pour les sommes d'argent dépensées dans ce type de gardiennage. Et il faudra également que les écoles se dotent, le plus tôt possible, de maternelles et de jardins pour les 4 ans et les 5 ans et cela à la grandeur du pays. Puisqu'il est utile d'avoir, basés sur les fonds publics, des services qui augmentent les chances des jeunes au niveau scolaire, tels maternelles et jardins, alors notre société a un devoir de mettre en place de telles structures; cela ne peut que diminuer les programmes de récupération aux niveaux secondaires et adultes en terme d'alphabétisation. Plusieurs suggestions et idées ont été lancées, plusieurs exemples d'activités à imiter dans le cadre scolaire ont été présentés, je ne les répéterai pas.

Mais je tiens à m'associer à l'idée de Terrence Hunsley lorsqu'il a indiqué l'importance de l'orientation dans les écoles. À l'heure actuelle, les services d'orientation se situent surtout aux niveaux de la 7e à la fin du secondaire. Si une grande part du succès futur se joue à l'élémentaire, les services d'orientation ne devraient-ils pas être plus importants à l'élémentaire? Il ne faudrait pas que ces services soient calqués sur ceux de l'école secondaire. Il faudrait leur trouver une saveur élémentaire. D'ailleurs, plusieurs expériences ont été conduites dans ce domaine.

Finalement, je voudrais glisser quelques mots au sujets des francophones hors Québec. Si les commentaires que je viens de faire s'appliquent à la population en général, ils s'appliquent doublement à la population de langue officielle minoritaire. Le niveau de décrochage chez les francophones hors Québec est généralement plus élevé que celui de la population majoritaire. Les différentes recherches, et surtout celles entreprises par l'Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, démontrent que l'étude dans la langue maternelle, dans un environnement scolaire homogène augmente les probabilités que les élèves poursuivront leurs études jusqu'à la fin du secondaire. Il y a encore trop de francophones hors Québec qui n'ont pas accès à une éducation d'un tel type. S'il y a plus de 150 000 jeunes à travers le Canada qui fréquentent une école de la minorité française élémentaire ou secondaire, il y a encore 115 000 jeunes francophones hors Québec entre 5 et 19 ans qui n'ont pas accès à une école reflétant leurs racines et leur culture. Il est important que les deux poids deux mesures qui existent à l'heure actuelle dans l'éducation de la langue de la minorité soient corrigés. Il est quand même étrange que l'on refuse un conseil scolaire à 250 élèves francophones à Edmonton alors qu'on retrouve au Canada des dizaines et des dizaines de conseils scolaires avec moins de 50 élèves de la majorité. Ce n'est qu'en créant des milieux homogènes qui seront le carrefour d'une activité francophone de plus en plus importante que le taux d'analphabétisme, encore beaucoup trop élevé chez les francophones hors Québec, pourra se résorber.

J'ai confiance que le leadership que vous exercez au niveau local pourra faciliter à la minorité de langue officielle hors Québec l'accès à une éducation de qualité qui assurera une alphabétisation complète de ses jeunes dans un système à leur ressemblance.

Je vous remercie de votre attention.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Julius Buski
The Alberta Teachers' Association

In inviting us to speak on the topic of "Where Do We Go From Here", Geraldine Gilliss indicated that we were free to reflect on any of the previous sessions or to introduce additional ideas that were of interest to us. I'll do some of each and blend the two.

In listening to the presentations and in reading up on the topic over the last year or so I have identified a number of threads which are woven into this topic of literacy. I'll speak briefly on ten of these.

1. The public is generally aware that there is a problem of illiteracy

If we can thank the Southam people for anything, it is for sensitizing the public to the fact that illiteracy is a problem. Flawed though the Southam News Literacy Survey was, the coverage accorded the results in print and non-print media ensured a great deal of sensitization. Certainly, the designation by UNESCO of 1990 as International Literacy Year has also helped focus attention.

The January 1990 issue of the supermarket favourite, Canadian Living, devoted a considerable amount of space to an examination of the problem. Indeed, printed in bold red across the top of the cover was "READ CANADA! 5 million illiterate Canadians need your help".

Peter Gzowski has devoted air time to it and has undertaken his own personal crusade, raising funds for Frontier College and its literacy program through his invitational golf tournaments.

My wife has provided me with an excellent personal example of public awareness of the problem. Several weeks ago she was in an unfamiliar shopping centre and stopped to ask one of the custodial workers for directions to a particular store. He said he wasn't sure where it was but then asked her if she could read. When she answered in the affirmative he informed her that there was a directional sign board and store index just around the corner. He wasn't being uncooperative. He also wasn't assuming that she could read. Perhaps he was illiterate himself. We don't know, but she found it an interesting experience.

I think we can safely say there is a general awareness level of illiteracy.

2. <u>The problem is real although the extent of its parameters can be argued</u>

One of the frustrating things about this topic is the lack of agreement on the definition of literacy. Trying to find a universally acceptable definition is somewhat akin to nailing jelly to the wall. The difficulty is that various special interest groups wish to add their own modifiers to it.

The Canadian Teachers' Federation defines it as follows:

> *Functional literacy involves using and responding to printed and written information to function in society. Those who are functionally literate are able to:*
>
> * *read and interpret prose of the type found in newspaper articles, magazines and books*
>
> * *identify and use information contained in documents such as forms, tables, charts and indexes*
>
> * *apply numerical operations to information contained in printed material such as a menu, cheque-book or advertisement.*

I like that definition. It sets out parameters which we can handle.

What about the parameters of the problem? The Southam study left much to be desired in terms of definition, design, process and conclusions. Geraldine Gilliss, CTF's Director of Research and Information Services wrote an excellent article, entitled "Understanding 'The Literacy Problem'". In her article, which appeared in the Sept.-Nov. issue of the CTF publication <u>Link</u> Geraldine notes that

> *In the Southam Study, a set of items was selected by a panel to exemplify a minimum level of functional literacy. All of the items selected were relatively simple. Those who did not get 80 per cent of the items correct were said to be functionally illiterate.*
>
> *This approach may have been useful in dramatizing and drawing attention to the idea of functional illiteracy. However, it should be noted that the Southam Study borrowed test items and design elements from a U.S. study of adult literacy which specifically rejected the method of analysis used in the Southam study.*

Geraldine goes on to provide a most interesting elaboration on this and I commend her article to you.

We can argue about this and other studies and probably should be critical. Nevertheless, I think there is agreement that an illiteracy problem exists, although there might not be complete agreement about its severity.

In a somewhat lighter vein and recalling what Dr. Wells was saying in his excellent presentation on Monday, it's interesting that through bafflegab and gobbledegook we sometimes work hard to create illiteracy.

On the plane ride here I was reading through a stack of applications for two staff positions which we're interviewing for later this week. One of the references included the following gem:

> *"He recognizes that he must approach life's challenges with the envisioned future firmly in mind while employing his repertoire of knowledge, skills and talents at the right time, in the right proportion and for the right duration".*

The editor of our in-house newsletter recently compiled several other gems, along with their true meaning. Here are a few for your amusement. If you're listening to the French interpretation, I'm sorry that they'll lose so much in the process.

> *"Integration of individual effort in harmonious group interaction.*
> *Translation: cooperation*
>
> *"Networking alternative career opportunities in an effort to obtain superior monetary compensation and additional peripheral perquisites".*
> *Translation: moonlighting*
>
> *"Subsequent to the announcement of department dissolution, Human Resources initiated preliminary inquiries into possible out-placement of dehired employees".*
> *Translation: We will help employees who were laid off to find new jobs.*

3. <u>Governments and business leaders are concerned</u>.

Education has been receiving a lot of attention lately. The OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) has focused on it.

The Prime Minister has expressed more than a passing interest in it.

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada has launched its national education indicators project. The most recent development in this project is the announcement of component three, entitled "Determining the Literacy and Numeracy Levels of 13-Year-Old and 16-Year-Old Canadian Students". At the end of March, CMEC put out a call for proposals for the development of assessment instruments to measure, in both official languages, the literacy and numeracy of the students mentioned.

The call for proposals outlines a process which appears reasonable and which involves teachers and their organizations. If it proceeds according to plan, is used properly, and a number of other caveats are satisfied, the information gathered will indeed be useful, for it will capture what is occurring in the schools, not in the population at large.

Business too is very concerned about literacy but from a somewhat different perspective. The rapid advances in technology are requiring not only a high degree of thinking skills in today's graduates but increased levels of reading ability. A friend of mine who does consulting and training for various businesses recently told me that even auto mechanics are finding the need for a reading level beyond that of high school in order to cope with the new equipment and manuals. This may be an exaggeration but I suspect that there is truth to the point being made, that we are pushing the threshold of acceptable reading level further up the scale.

4. <u>Action is being taken on a broken front</u>.

What activity!
"Canadian Authors Write about Literacy"
"Official International Literacy year Poster"
"Directory of Literacy Organizations"
"CTF Conference on Literacy and the Schools"
"Read-A-Thon Initiates Year of Literacy Project"
"Literacy Exchange".

It's almost impossible to pick up an educational journal or teacher association publication this year and not read about some project related to literacy. There are literally dozens of them. Everybody's doing it: parent groups, community organizations, schools, teachers, teacher associations, parent associations, businesses, publishers, journalists. The list goes on and on. It's a popular cause and I think that's great. International Literacy Year has really started things moving. The activity <u>is</u> occurring on a broken front and that too is good. It serves to reinforce that this is not a problem which resides solely in the schools.

5. The contributing factors are unstable, i.e. they shift in severity and are not readily controllable.

We all know what kind of a home environment we would like our students to come from -- a nurturing one, a home where there are two parents, where parents have time to spend with their children, read to them, monitor the use of television, have sufficient funds to provide for the necessities and so on. Unfortunately, such is not the case for many of our students.

Poverty is unfortunately a major problem in our society and last year the Canadian Teachers' Federation released an excellent report on the topic. It calls for urgent action on the part of government.

Speaking recently at the Canadian Association of Principals 8th Annual Conference in Halifax, Dr. Ernest Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and a former U.S. Commissioner of Education, noted that "Education cannot be divorced from the problem of the poor. Children who are impoverished are linguistically deprived".

It's difficult to teach a hungry child. It's difficult to teach a child when there is no caring environment at home. It's difficult to teach a child preoccupied with an unhappy home situation. The litany continues.

There are many factors which lead to the illiteracy problem. Among these are poverty, gender equity, home background, structure of the family, language spoken at home, skills of the parents and absence of a nurturing environment. Quite obviously, these are factors outside the purview of the school. Nevertheless, it is distressing to us as educators to have any student leave school without the basic reading and numerical skills, despite the fact that we are asked each day to take on more and more.

Ah, and then there's the retention rate. If we can't hold the students in school we certainly can't do anything for them. But that's another major topic.

6. Most of the factors are outside of the school's control.

I've already touched on this in my previous remarks. We are not in a position to provide the necessary social programs. This is a function of governments, governments which are attempting to curtail spending and balance budgets at any cost.

7. No one group will be able to effect a quick or even long range fix.

Illiteracy didn't arise overnight. It's not a new phenomenon. What is new is the interest in it -- the concern because of rapidly expanding technology, our shifting economic patterns and the necessity to compete in world markets.

What is heartening is the spirit of cooperation which seems to be emerging in addressing the problem.

8. Additional resources will be required in a time of shrinking budgets.

As stated already, it will cost money to hold students in school. It will cost money to provide adequate day care for children whose parents both have to work and for children of single parents. It will take money to provide adequate ESL programs for immigrant children. None of these is an inexpensive undertaking. But, as Terrance Hunsley indicated yesterday, it is just as expensive, if not more so, to do nothing.

9. Teachers and school cannot do it alone.

The school day is too short, the demands on the schools too many and the resources inadequate to expect us as teachers to have all the fixes. We are willing to accept our share of the responsibility, however.

10. We can make a difference.

Geraldine asked us to end the conference on an upbeat positive tone. Despite the problems facing us, and there are many, I believe that this is one issue we can make progress on. We have to. By "we" I mean not only teachers and educational institutions but society cooperatively.

To begin with, we are, I believe, entering a new era of cooperative efforts between schools and the business community. The agenda is a complex one and there is much mistrust but we need to work at these cooperative ventures. Together, we can address such questions as the following, identified by Barbara Hutson:

1. What kinds and degrees of literacy will be required for work in the near future?
2. Is there school-based inequity in access to job tracks (even if unintended) based in part on differential literacy instruction for students in various social groups?

3. Is there discontinuity between the aspects of literacy stressed in school and those required for literacy at work?
4. If there is discontinuity, should all responsibility for training technical literacy be left to industry and individual workers, or should the school act to develop students' technical literacy?
5. If the school takes responsibility for technical literacy, can approaches suggested by conceptualizations and tactics in the study of literacy at work be applied to literacy in school to reduce this discontinuity?

In addition, we need to reexamine our teacher education programs. There is increasing evidence that the traditional course-bound approach to teacher preparation is inadequate in providing the necessary understanding of how literacy is imparted. We seriously need to look at integrated programs in our faculties of education.

I was most interested in Dr. Well's reference to Vygotsky. One of Vygotsky's beliefs was that the teacher must mediate between the children and those tasks they are not yet capable of. More recent writers have assigned the term "scaffolding" to this process, i.e., a support that is adjustable but temporary. If you are interested in reading further on this and related topics, I recommend to you a book entitled "The Contexts of School-Based Literacy" edited by Taffy Raphael and published by Random House. This excellent volume records the proceedings of the Contexts of Literacy Conference of June, 1984, co-sponsored by the University of Utah and Michigan State University.

On the home front, schools have a golden opportunity to work with parent and community groups, to fling open their doors and provide a base for programs which can increase literacy and draw the public back into the schools.

I can't close without saying something about class size. I refute any suggestion that we can successfully free up education dollars by increasing class sizes. This simplistic and wrong-headed industrial approach to education does not take cognizance of a host of other factors, including school size, location and teacher stress. In Alberta, as in other jurisdictions, the days lost due to teacher stress have become a major liability to benefit plans.

The opportunities to do something about illiteracy are many. This conference has provided us with some of the basic information. What is important is what we make of it. What is important is what all of us, teachers, teacher organizations, educational institutions, business, parents and all levels of government make of it.

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